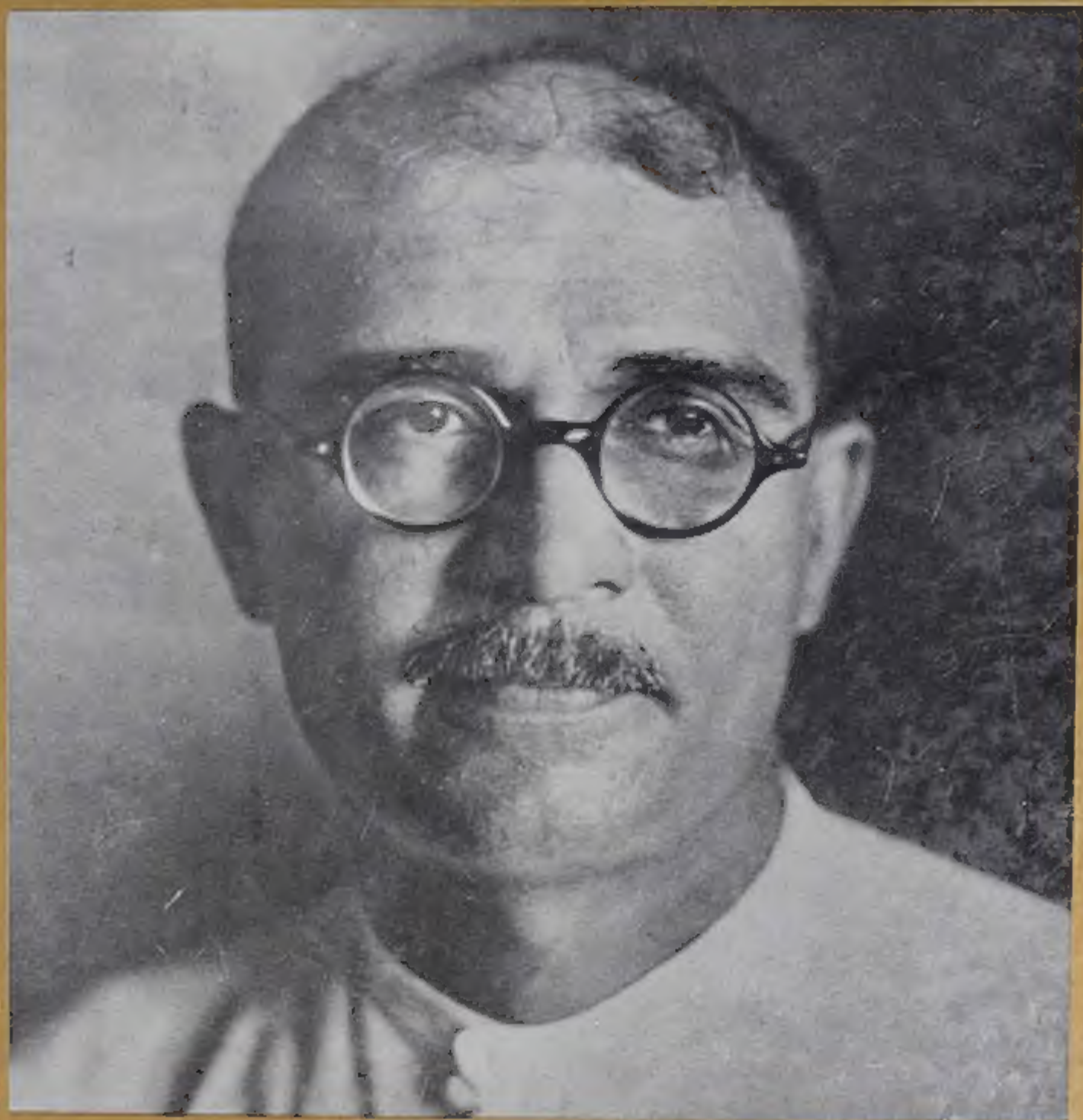


THE FIRE AND THE ROSE

27/9/11



Birth : 1-1-1892]

MAHADEVBHAI

[Death : 15-8-1942

NARAYAN DESAI

Translated By
DR. CHITRA DESAI

Gandhi Heritage Portal



Gandhi Heritage Portal

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THE FIRE AND THE ROSE

NARAYAN DESAI



THE FIRE AND THE ROSE

[BIOGRAPHY OF MAHADEV BHAI]

29791

BY
NARAYAN DESAI

Translated by
Dr. CHITRA DESAI



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD - 380 014

THE FIRE AND THE ROSE
IN THE HAND OF NARAYAN DESAI

1979
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© Narayan Desai, 1995

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Ahmedabad - 380 014
INDIA

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To
Those whom I remembered
Again and Again
Whilst
Writing, printing and publishing
this book,
Puja Naraharikaka,
Pyare Mohan
and Dear Bhaidas.

FOREWORD

This is a great story skilfully told. I feel like soaking myself in its waters, for they transmit the richness in Mahadev Desai's life and in his relationship with Mahatma Gandhi.

It seems as if Providence brought the two together in order to give a turn to Indian history. It is true that in 1915 Gandhi, recently returned from South Africa, was yearning for a round-the-clock ally who would be accomplished, faithful and truthful. It is also true, as this book reveals, that Mahadev Desai, a sensitive young man with a flair for friendship and with literary gifts in English and Gujarati, was consciously or unconsciously longing for a chance to serve a man worth serving. Though their desires were complementary, but for Providence they would have walked past each other. What may be the Divine Designer's simple plan is a marvel for us. I marvel at the historical fact that Mohan and Mahadev found each other, multiplying Gandhi's effectiveness and hastening India's freedom.

The second thing that strikes me, considering the two, is the union of God and country in the thoughts of both. Each wants to reduce the distance between himself and God, and between India and her happiness. We know about saints, and we know of patriots. Today there may be a shortage of both, but everyone has his or her idea of a saint and of a patriot. But that a man can be both a saint and a patriot, and that a saint may be less of a saint if he is not also a patriot, and a patriot less patriotic if he is not also striving to be a saint, are distinctive ideas. They mark that age of which the Gandhi-Desai alliance is a symbol.

The phrase "alliance" should be stressed. It is true that Mahadev Desai often took Gandhi's dictation — in his life and on his notebooks. His diaries recorded Gandhi's doings, conversations, political parleys, ethical dilemmas. Sometimes his articles and briefings interpreted Gandhi's mind better than Gandhi's own pen or tongue. Waking up before Gandhi in pre-dawn darkness, and going to sleep long after his Master, Desai lived Gandhi's day thrice over — first in an attempt to anticipate it, next in spending it alongside Gandhi, and finally in recording it into his diary. He therefore was Gandhi's aide, secretary and interpreter, but this "correct" description

excludes the independent mind, conscience and pen that Desai supplied and Gandhi relied upon.

Desai had pledged himself to obey Gandhi, a pledge he never broke; but he had also pledged himself to assist Gandhi, and this assistance he gave with a frankness that matched his devotion. We may note, too, as this book informs us, that he saw a man, not a Godman, in Gandhi, a pilgrim and a General, not an infallible human being. Gandhi and Desai were fellow-seekers. They were allies. In addition, Gandhi looked upon him as a son, and said to him in 1917: "I have got in you the man I wanted — the man to whom I can entrust all my work some day and be at ease."

The Empire's Viceroys regarded Mahadev as Gandhi's emissary. Sometimes he negotiated on Gandhi's behalf with touchy Indian politicians. And when men like the Sardar and Rajaji argued with the Mahatma, Mahadev felt free to choose his side — until Gandhi's final decision, which he would accept.

Devotion ended in sacrifice, and we close this book wondering about the place of sacrifice in life. Can life avoid sacrifice? Can sacrifice avoid lingering sadness? We meet sacrifice again and again on the pages of this book. In 1931, Mahadev walks eagerly, accompanied by Agatha Harrison, to Harrods in London, to buy something for a little son back at home. There before him is a dazzling display of beautiful things. Not all of them are *all* that expensive, and the children of his friends from school and college perhaps have similar toys, but Mahadev shakes his head, for he and Gandhi have come to London on behalf of the poor of India. All he will buy is a paint-box for sixpence and a drawing book from another shop.

Mahadev wrote poetry in college and produced consummate Gujarati translations of some of Tagore's work and of pieces of English verse. But his hope of translating all of Tagore from Bengali into Gujarati remained unfulfilled, and the novels of his own that he wished to write died unborn.

He was only fifty when, on August 15, 1942, he suddenly died in detention in Pune, his head in the lap of another prisoner, Bapu. It was Gandhi who was to have died. If arrested he might fast unto death, Gandhi had earlier warned. Mahadev had passionately opposed the idea. After Mahadev's going, Gandhi abandoned it. Thus far Mahadev had spoken, written and negotiated on Gandhi's behalf. Now he died for him.

We bow before the sacrifice. It was the climax of devotion. It was a giving up for a Master, a man, a friend. It was an offering to God and to India. Word of the sacrifice penetrated the Raj's barbed wires and stirred India. Fifty-two years later, its recollection moves

us, and puts in their place our grumblings at petty inconveniences today.

I know I speak for many when I thank Narayanbhai for writing this treasure of a book about his father. The journey into the past must have given him both pride and pain. If, as I believe, the spirits of Mahadevbhai and Bapu are alive, they perhaps see in this book, and in Narayanbhai's dedication of which it is a fruit, signs that their sacrifices were not in vain.

To be associated with the book through these words is a privilege for me. I offer thanks and appreciation to Dr. Chitra Desai for the spirit in which she has translated it from the Gujarati original.

New Delhi,
August 18, 1994

RAJMOHAN GANDHI

HOMAGE TO FATHER

The year of Mahadev's Birth Centenary was an year for me to pay homage to my father in gratefulness (Hindus perform this rite ceremoniously of paying homage to ancestors) I would get invitations from a number of places to participate in the celebration of the occasion This gave me the opportunity to discover new points of view to look up to my father. During talks with friends and colleagues, I would feel elated to see his life becoming an inspiration to the new generation. Soul's 'half-life' is no less potent than radio activity.

I valiantly undertook to write his biography as my contribution to the celebration of the centenary. Before writing I realised that the work was not as easy as was expected. When I completed writing it, I realised that the whole of my work resulted into the joy of my life

I was not only an admirer of Mahadevbhai. I was also his son. I found that, that objectivity was desirable when it was natural but not so desirable when it needed effort to cultivate it. The reverential tribute will always be tender with emotion, and it should be judged not by 'what people would say about it?' but by 'what does your heart say about it?' This is an action to present within the framework of truth, the probity of a person along with the events of his life.

Initially, I faced difficulties and perplexities. No doubt I was Mahadevbhai's son, but I had stayed with him only for the last six years of his life. And those six years were those of my adolescence. They cannot be considered adequate for writing a biography. Full fifty years have gone by since Mahadevbhai passed away. It was difficult to find his contemporaries meeting whom, I could collect heaps of material. Whomsoever I found gave blessings, not information Mahadevbhai was an inveterate correspondent, but his letters were not preserved by his family. Was it not a folly on our part? My mother had torn off the letters, off and on. Some must have gone astray because of change of residence and imprisonments. My condition was like :

Mind you were not awake,
When your dear one came to the door.
You heard only the sound of his departing-footsteps,
That woke you up in deep darkness.

I went through the diaries, which were supposed to be Mahadevbhai's diaries, but in reality they were Gandhiji's diaries. I searched some of them which were around the date of my birth, but there was no mention, whatsoever, of the birth of his only son.

Thus, before I began writing, I realised that the work was difficult. But there were two or three factors which saw this thing through. One was my obstinacy about writing the biography, no matter what the difficulties. Another was the enthusiastic encouragement of many friends. A special mention must be made of Vanmala and Mahendra V. Desai. Vanmala encouraged me by saying, 'the incidents may already have been written by others, but you will instil a personal touch in them'. Mahendra did the job of pushing a person learning to swim, into the water, by saying, 'consider it a purifying work for ourselves and write'.

But the key was found from the other end. 'If you cannot find Mahadev because he was merged into Mohan, why don't you search for him in Mohan?' I began my search with this attitude. And I found Mahadev at hundreds of places in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Once I caught hold of Gandhiji, there was no other alternative but to meet Mahadevbhai at every step. After finding him with Gandhiji, I went on getting glimpses of Mahadev, rummaging through the writings of all those, such as Sardar, Jawahar, Devdas, Rajaji, Naraharibhai and Pyarelal. There was so much of him that then, it became a happy yet difficult task of selecting what to include and what not to include in the biography.

This is certainly not the work of a single individual. Innumerable people offered to help and actually helped me.

Probably I got the greatest support from my predecessors who had written about him. The first twenty-five years of his life would have been in complete darkness if 'Naraharibhai's *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharit* was not available. Chandulal B. Dalal's *Swa Mahadev Desai-nan-Smritichitro* and Gandhiji-nin-Dinvari helped to get hold of many links in the narrative. Vajubhai Shah's *Sarva-Shubhopamayogya Mahadevbhai* removed my doubts of a biographer being an admirer at the same time. I have taken with due reverence, the title of the book from Jhaverchand Meghani.

I had an unusual experience while writing. The material for which I would be searching, would just appear before me in the form of books, letters, newspapers, or occasionally in the form of a

memorable incident heard from an unexpected source I considered this, a grace of God.

I had gone to Shri C. N. Patel to request him to write the Foreword for the book. Not only did he gladly give his consent to it, but he made me extremely happy by expressing his readiness to go through and examine the entire manuscript. His guidance made me aware of a number of my responsibilities as a writer. If this was not the grace of God what else could it be?

Thanks have to be extended to many, many people and institutions.

Our typist Zahiruddin M. Sayyed, was actually a part-time worker. But he worked incessantly on this manuscript, regardless of night or day. Mahadevbhai charmed him. He may perhaps thank Mahadevbhai, but I must thank him.

Institutions :

Shri Mahadev Desai Janma Shatabdi Samiti, Gujarat :

For the inspiration, co-operation and help given from the time of writing to the time of publishing the book

Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati :

For giving me copies of some valuable hand written correspondence and making some books available to me

Nehru Sangrahalaya and Pustakalaya, New Delhi :

For allowing me to go through a number of collections of hand-written correspondence.

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Bombay :

For making a number of books available to me

Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad :

For giving help generously to the Shatabdi Samiti which made the book easily available to all

To,

Women :

Padmaben Bhavsar — for her various types of assistance at every step.

Kurangi and Chitra Desai — For suggestions and encouragement while translating the book into Hindi and English.

Manognya, Dipika, Sujata, Panthini, Dua, Hansaben, Kanchanben, Vasudhaben, Ushaben Mehta, Usha Trivedi and Monghiben — for various types of assistance.

Men :

Haridev Sharma — For giving all facilities in the Nehru Museum and for valuable suggestions.

Amrit Modi — For giving the support towards the entire plan of the publication of the book.

Jitendra Desai — For giving the printing an aura of devotion.

All the members of the Shatabdi Samiti :

For being generous with regard to the gradual increase in the size of the book as also the slight delay in publishing it.

Haku Shah : For suggestions about the get-up of the book.

Lakshmanbhai Makvana, Jasbhai Patel and a number of students from Swaraj Ashram, Vedchhi . For giving help as volunteers.

Subhash Mehta — Bombay — For making available some literature

And — Lastly Sampoorna Kranti Vidyalaya — For generously permitting me to give a higher priority to writing rather than my usual work as a teacher for nine full months.

I am grateful to them all —

Sampoorna Kranti Vidyalaya,

Vedchhi - 394 641

5-6-1992

NARAYAN DESAI

FROM THE GUJARATI FOREWORD

I fully understood the appropriateness of the epithet given by Jhaverchand Meghani to Mahadevbhai. I also grasped the suitability of the title given to the book — which was written as a homage to the father — having changed the title of the first chapter (which originally was the same as given to the book). I am sure that the readers will get the same impression of the story of the rose that bloomed in a sacrificial fire, that I got and the combination of the fragrance of the rose and the acute poignancy of the sacrificial fire, would be instructive.

Gandhiji had very rightly described Mahadevbhai's life, as 'a poem of endless devotion', referring to two extraordinary aspects of his life. To grasp that poetic essence of Mahadevbhai's life, we have to understand the same essence of Gandhiji's life. Gandhiji is called "the Father of the Nation". His *purushartha* in this direction was like an Epic poem. Just as Ganesh wrote down the words of Maharshi Vyasa, Mahadevbhai wrote down the innumerable letters to and by Gandhiji, his dialogues, his conversations, and lectures, in his own picturesque language in such a way that he made the reader almost feel being a witness to all the above regarding Gandhiji — the modern sage and thinker. It may be that some may find it is exaggeration to say so, but the real evaluation of Mahadevbhai's work can be done only through some such simile.

The fight for freedom of modern India was also like the war between the might of the divine and the demonical forces as in the Mahabharata. Enthusiastic patriots would be tempted to compare the English as representing the demons and the Indian leaders as representing the deities in this struggle. But as a matter of fact there was a mixture of both the divine and otherwise among the English and the Indian leaders as well. And Gandhiji's constant effort was to purify both the sides through the spiritual strength of Truth and Non-Violence. At the young age of twenty-four years and during the first meeting, with Gandhiji, Mahadevbhai recognised that ability and resolved to sit at his feet. ('Narahari, I have half a mind to go and sit at the feet of this man.') (Chap. 9, p. 57)

"I am approaching the new year . . . reading 'Bapu' for He (God) whenever it occurs for the simple reason that I have no vision of Him, whereas I have some vision of Bapu." One can get a measure of Mahadevbhai's intellectual richness from the fact of his passing B A from the Elphinstone College at the age of eighteen years. But to get a better understanding of the same one must read *Mahadevbhai's Diaries* and 'My Submission', a Preface written for the English translation of *Anāsaktiyoga* written by Gandhiji. It would be necessary to make a careful study of the notes written on some verses and the minute study of some questions relating to *Bhagvad Gita*. In that he has referred to and quoted, more than sixty foreign writers and poets, such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelly, Keats, Byron and Browning, over and above Indian writers and thinkers. He has also quoted in the original Sanskrit from the Vedas and the Upanishads. Mahadevbhai's subjects in B A. were Logic and Moral Philosophy. When and how did he acquire such vast knowledge of Sanskrit? And when did he study the Muslim and Christian sawants, who also have been mentioned and quoted in 'My Submission'?

Narayanbhai has personified Mahadevbhai, who almost appears like a character of the Epics, as a live historical personality and at times as a close kinsman, by quoting from innumerable writings of Gandhiji, Sardar, Nehru, Rajaji, Narharibhai, Pyarelal and other contemporaries; by giving references from countless published and unpublished letters, at times giving more importance to analysis rather than the chronological dates, and by paying equal attention to Mahadevbhai's probity as to his biographical details. I am sure that this book — Narayanbhai's homage to his father, will be satisfying and inspiring to the readers of Gujarat.

4, Neelkanth Park,
Navrangpura,
Ahmedabad - 380 009
23-8-1992

C. N. PATEL

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

1991-92 was the Birth Centenary year of late Shri Mahadevbhai Desai, Gandhiji's Personal Secretary. His son, Narayan Desai, undertook to write his biography in Gujarati before the year was out, and *Agnikund-Man-Ugelun Gulab*, was released on 2nd October, 1992. What a speedy and spontaneous accomplishment !

When Narayan Desai declared his intention of writing this biography, some time in 1991, there was a point raised that late Shri Mahadev Desai belonged to all India, not only to Gujarat, and so his biography should be translated into Hindi, English and several other Indian languages.

It was at this juncture before the book was published that I proposed translating the work into English and Narayan Desai very kindly gave permission to me to do so. I may mention here that we had known each other since 1942, although for many years in between we had not seen each other as our lives had taken totally different courses.

What was it that prompted me to undertake such a difficult task ? Mahadevbhai had so merged himself into Gandhiji that I knew that this biography would be fascinating to translate. His biography would be a history of revolution in human life in India. Moreover, it would be a saga unfolding Mahadevbhai's profound attributes, exceptional capabilities as a man of letters, as a journalist, as a secretary, and as a devotee of Gandhiji. It was a joy for me to venture forth for the effort by translating this big volume. And really the book has turned out to be remarkable.

Narayan Desai's own life-long practice of Gandhian way of life, his close contacts with the present day Gandhian experiments all over the world, combined with his clear and pleasant literary acumen have turned this book into a biography with a difference.

Narayan Desai's thoughts and his approach to life are artistically well-knit in the book. Narayan has a style of writing which makes the reader look on every page with wonder. Nowhere does the reader lose interest. It is Narayan Desai's accomplishment. He has turned the life of a remarkable individual into a story of the triumph of the life-force.

Moreover, as my father had known Mahadevbhai fairly well, I was keen to pay my tribute. I was unable to contribute anything to the volume *Shukratarak Sama Mahadevbhai*, a volume of tributes and

incidents from his life, released by the 'Mahadev Desai Janma Shatabdi Samiti', Gujarat, because of other personal obligations and as such this opportunity, I took as god-sent, though a daunting task

It was an added happiness when the original Gujarati book received The Sahitya Akademi Award for 1993, for the best Gujarati work, along with books of other languages. I was, at least, covered with the reflected glory of having translated an award winning book.

I must say that this work could not be accomplished without the guidance and help from a number of people. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of them :

To Narayan Desai for giving permission to translate; for going through the entire manuscript and inserting relevant and important corrections, suggestions; and for giving general guidance;

To Dr Alooben Dastur, who very kindly went through the entire manuscript carefully and gave her valuable comments and corrections;

To Shri Rajmohan Gandhi, for very kindly and readily accepting to write the excellent Foreword; To Dr Ushaben Mehta for her constant guidance and support;

To Sunderbhai Shetty, Assistant Librarian, Manibhavan Gandhi Sangrahalaya, who readily provided me with relevant references;

To Ushaben Trivedi, Librarian, Gandhi Sangrahalaya, who also gave guidance and help;

To Mary Dowling, a volunteer at Sampurna Kranti Vidyalaya, Vedchhi who, in a very short time available to her, went through the entire manuscript and wrote down some very important suggestions;

To Bhaktiben Shah, and Villu Pithavala for the beautiful cover page;

To my sister, Kurangi Desai, who has translated the book into Hindi, for her encouraging help during the entire period,

To Manognya Desai, for getting the manuscript re-typed for the press and taking numerous trips from North to South Bombay,

To Shital Vora of Baroda for helping to get some of the last chapters typed in a short time,

To Jagdishbhai Parikh for going through the entire text before publication;

To Subhash Mehta, for the initial help for the Glossary;

To the Navajivan Trust for the excellent publication; and

To the entire staff of Manibhavan, and all those who assisted me directly or indirectly in my efforts.

I am grateful to all.

12/C, Maheshwari Mansion,
34, Nepean Sea Road,
Bombay - 400 026

CHITRA DESAI

*"If I am asked what was Mahadev's greatest quality,
I would say his ability to reduce himself to Zero
whenever occasion demanded it."*

- M. K. Gandhi

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In what sacred frame
 You lighted your life's lamp
When you came down to this World,
O *Sadhak**, O lover, O man of vision !

Adrift in the uncharted Sea,
 Sorrow strikes,
The chords of your heart into a song
When dangers beset you,
Behind the menace you see mother's smile,
And you laugh at danger.

Pleasure you consign to fire
As you roam about seeking joy.
Why do they make you weep and lament
Even though you have given them your love.

You have no thought for the morrow,
No care at all,
Friend or companion you have none,
Oblivious of death
You fleet in joy
In the sea of limitless life.

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

**Sadhak* : a seeker after higher values of life



Birth : 1-1-1892}

Mahadevbhai

[Death : 15-8-1942



Gandhiji and Mahadev, 8th August 1942



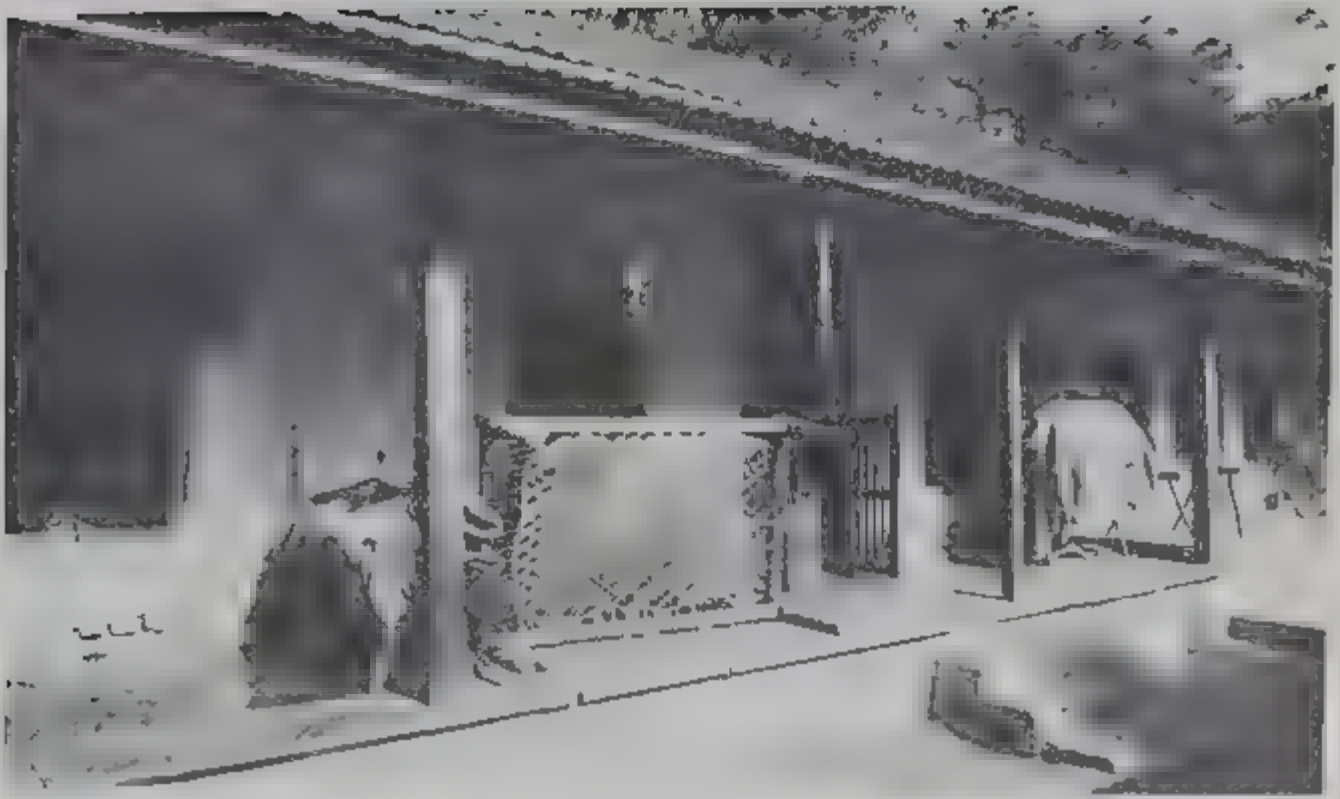
Mahadev



Siddhanath Mahadev's
Temple, Saras, Olpad

Residence at Dihen — Newly constructed.
During Legal Practice;
1914-15, Devji Saraya Lane, Ahmedabad





Teachers' Residence, Sabarmati Ashram.
Residence of Kakasaheb, Kishorelal and Mahadev

Mahadev Kutir, Sevagram





In Simla —

Standing : Mahadev, Narayan,
Munshi

Sitting : Rajkumar
Amrit Kaur, Durgaben



In Agra Jail : 1922
Barrister Khwaja Saheb,
Rajbahadur of Eta,
Mahadev, George Joseph

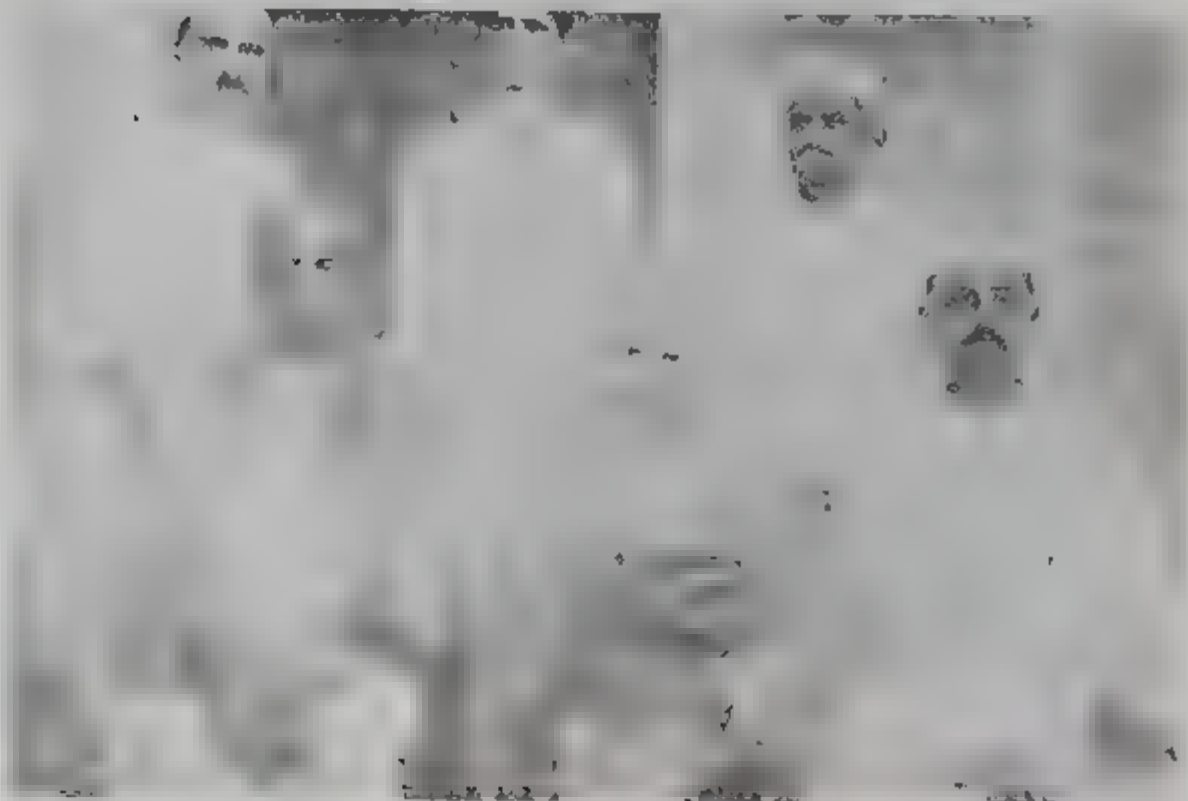
In Sabarmati Ashram :
1927-28





Standing : Girdharī Kṛpālānī, Mahadev, Pyarelāl, Mritunjay Prasad,
Brijkrishna Chandiwalā, Imamsaheb (sitting)

Bardoli Satyagraha Inquiry Committee : 1928
Sitting : Vallabhbhai, Bhulabhai Desai, Mahadev
Standing : Narahari Parikh, Ramnarayan V. Pathak





During Bardoli Satyagraha

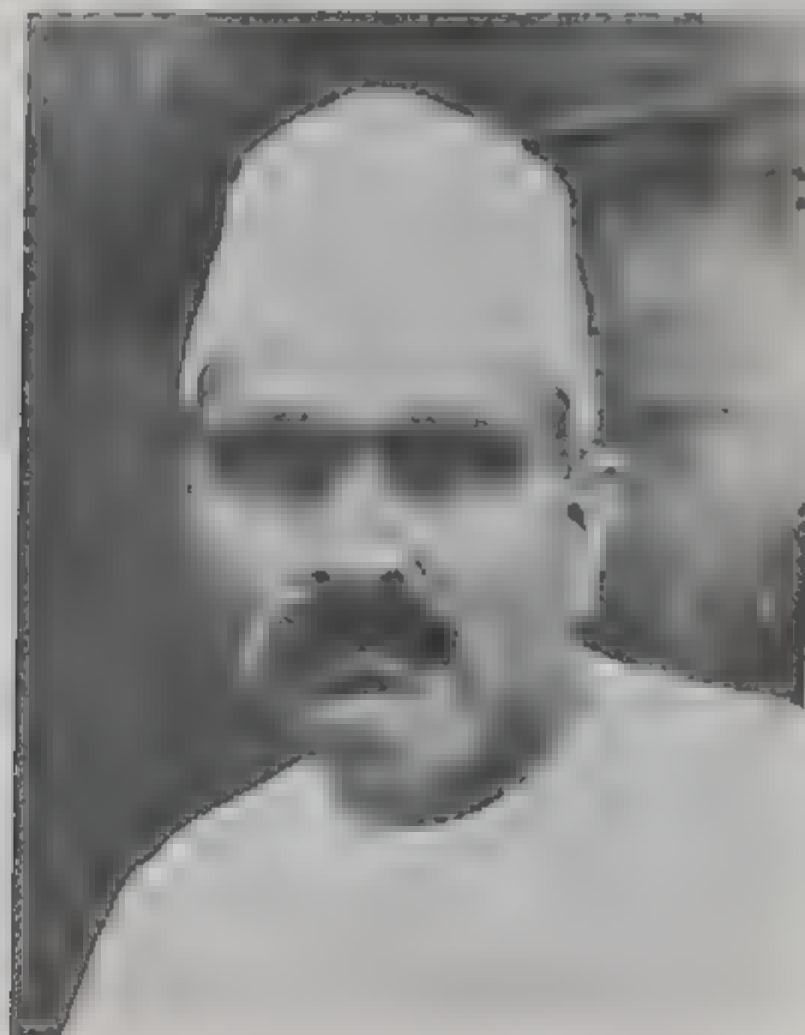


During Salt Satyagraha



Public Meeting on the Banks of Sabarmati : 1930

Narahari Parikh during Dharasana Satyagraha





The trio : Mahadev, Ba and Bapu

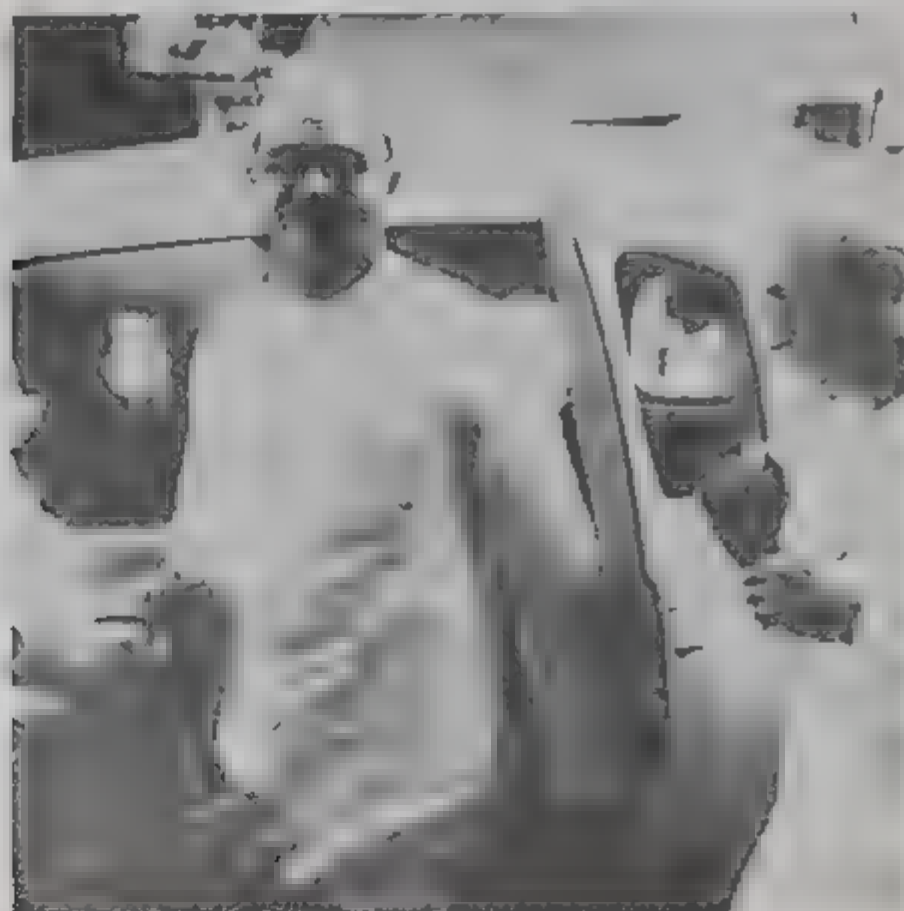


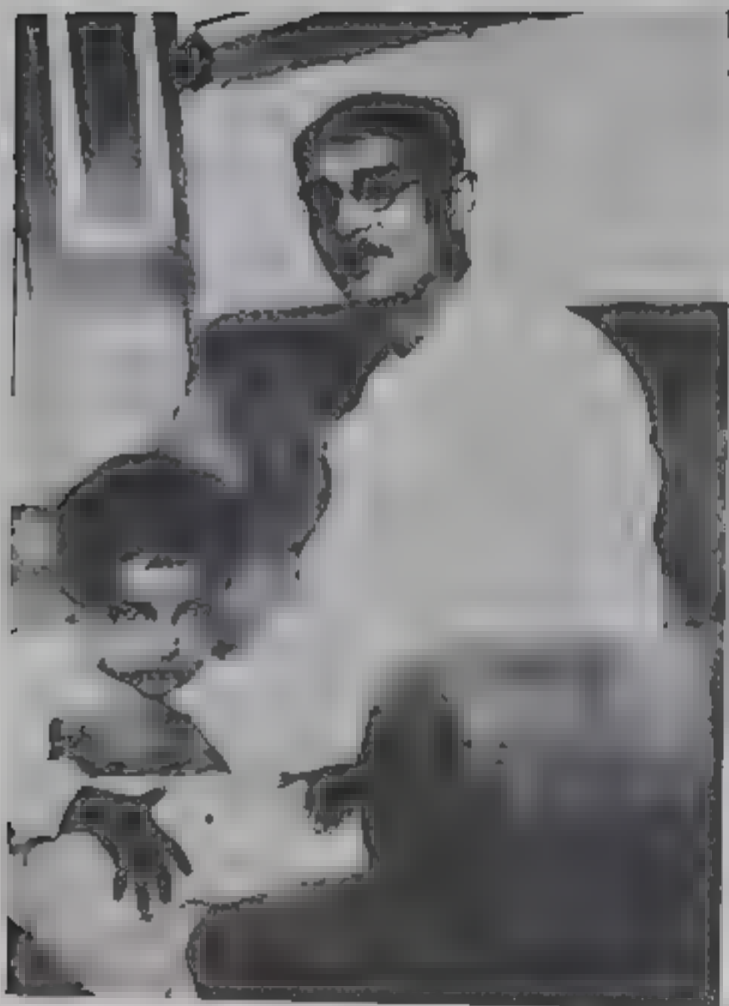
Mahadev, on the alert
during Gandhiji's fast



Amongst Khudai Khidmatgars : With Badshahkhan and others in the North-West Frontier Province

In Bombay with Vitthaladas Jerajan





Affectionate Mahadev, probably
with Bipin Dahyabhai Patel



In a public meeting : Mahadev,
Gandhiji, Dr Sushila Nayar,
Vallabhbhai, Kakasaheb



The Round Table Conference

Spanning on the ship : Miraben, Gandhiji, Mahadev





On the way to the Round Table Conference : With the Captain on
S. S. RAJPUTANA. Gandhiji and Mahadev, putting on the Life-belt

Gandhiji engrossed in thought – in Baston (Britain), Mahadev





In Marseilles en route London for The Second Round Table Conference Sarojini Naidu, Prabhashankar Pattani, Gandhiji, Shrinivasa Ayengar, Mahadev, C I' Andrews, Muriel Lester, Miraben — Mahadev and Pyarelal at the back with a "Gandhi Cap"

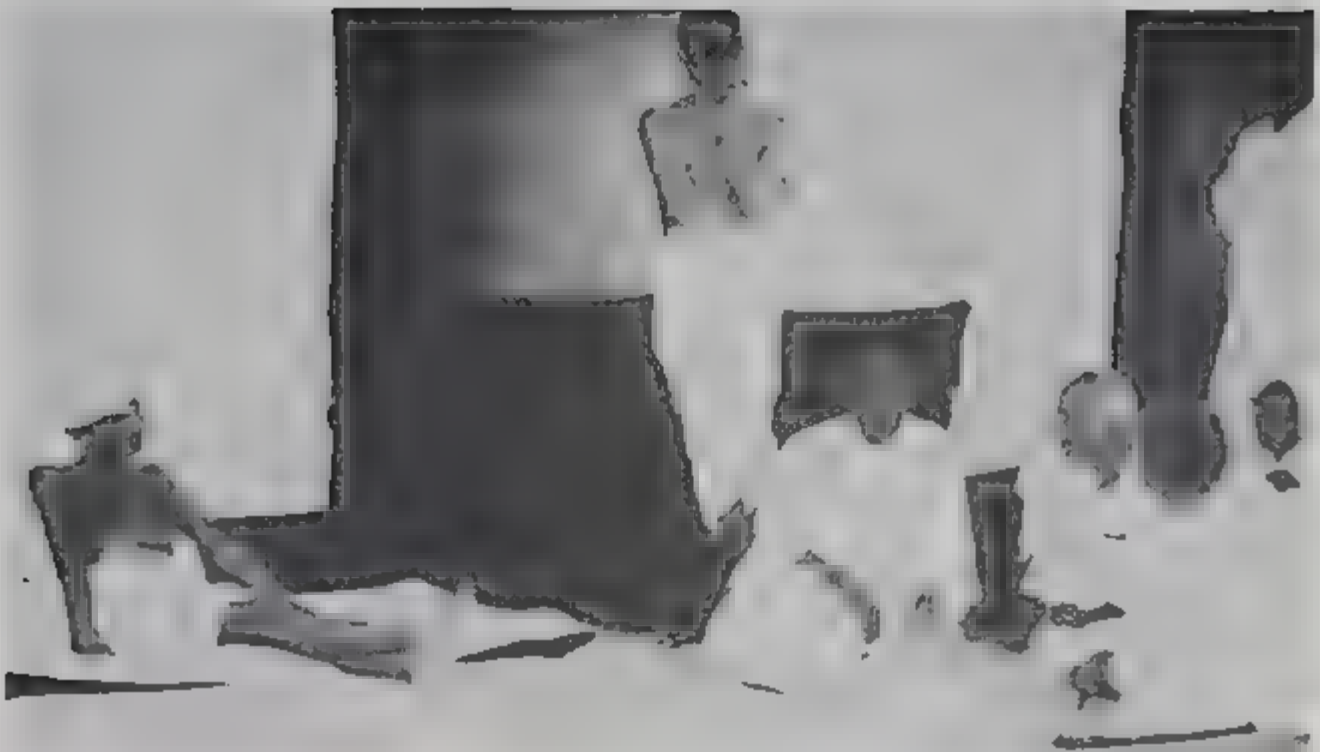
In London :

Sitting : Muriel Lester, Agatha Harrison, Gandhiji, Miraben

Standing Third from the left Pyarelal, Devdas Ghanshyamdas Birla, Mahadev

Sitting on two sides of the sofa two bodyguards Evans and Roger





In Borsad with workers, 31-5-1935, two bare-bodies mendicants

In Wardha : 1935 —
Mahadev, Narayan, Durgaben, Paramanand at the back





Faizpur Congress : 8-4-1936 —
 Raosaheb Patwardhan, Gandhiji, Premaben Kantak, Mahadev

At the inauguration of Khadi Exhibition at Haripura Congress 10-2-1938
 Miraben, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Mahadev, Gandhiji

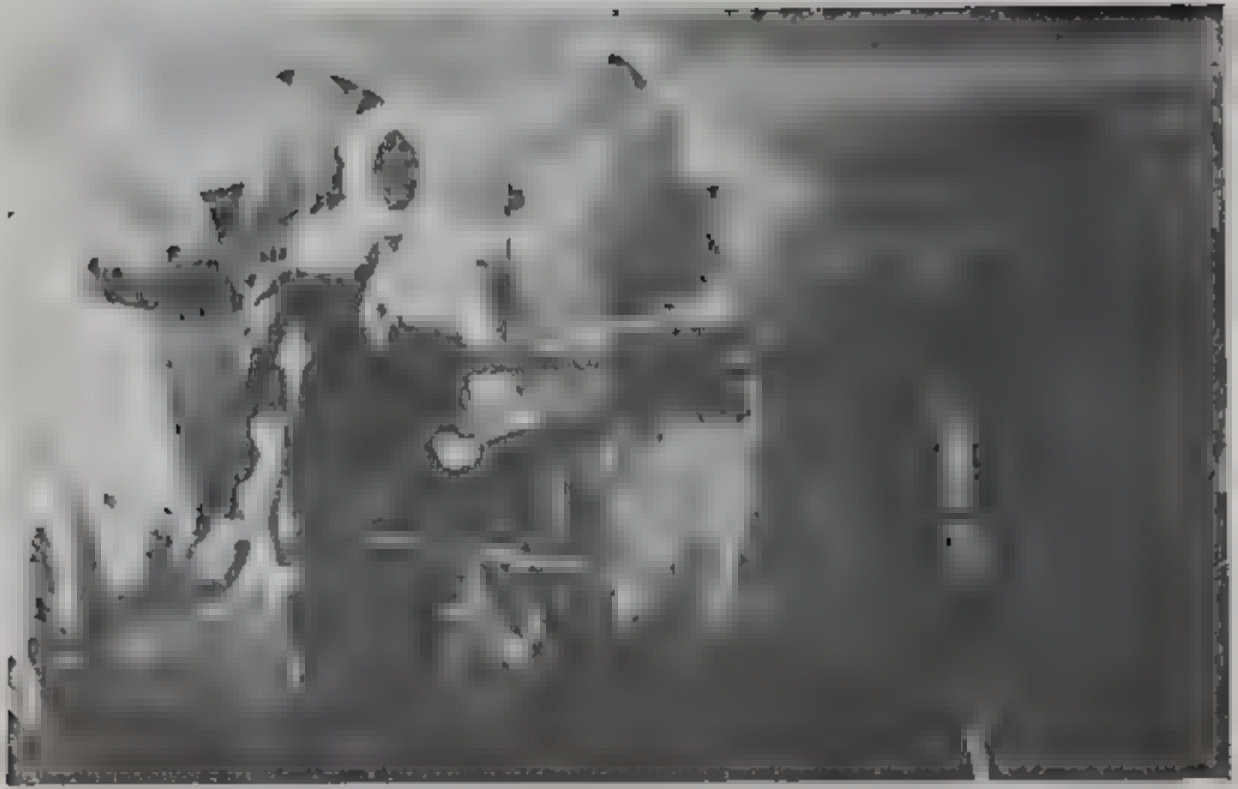




Faizpur Congress : Writing whilst standing



Haripura Congress : Scrutiny
of the Exhibition 12-2-1938
Dr. Kumarappa, Pyarelal,
Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,
Gandhiji, Mahadev



With Lord Lothian and Miraben in a 'Rengi'

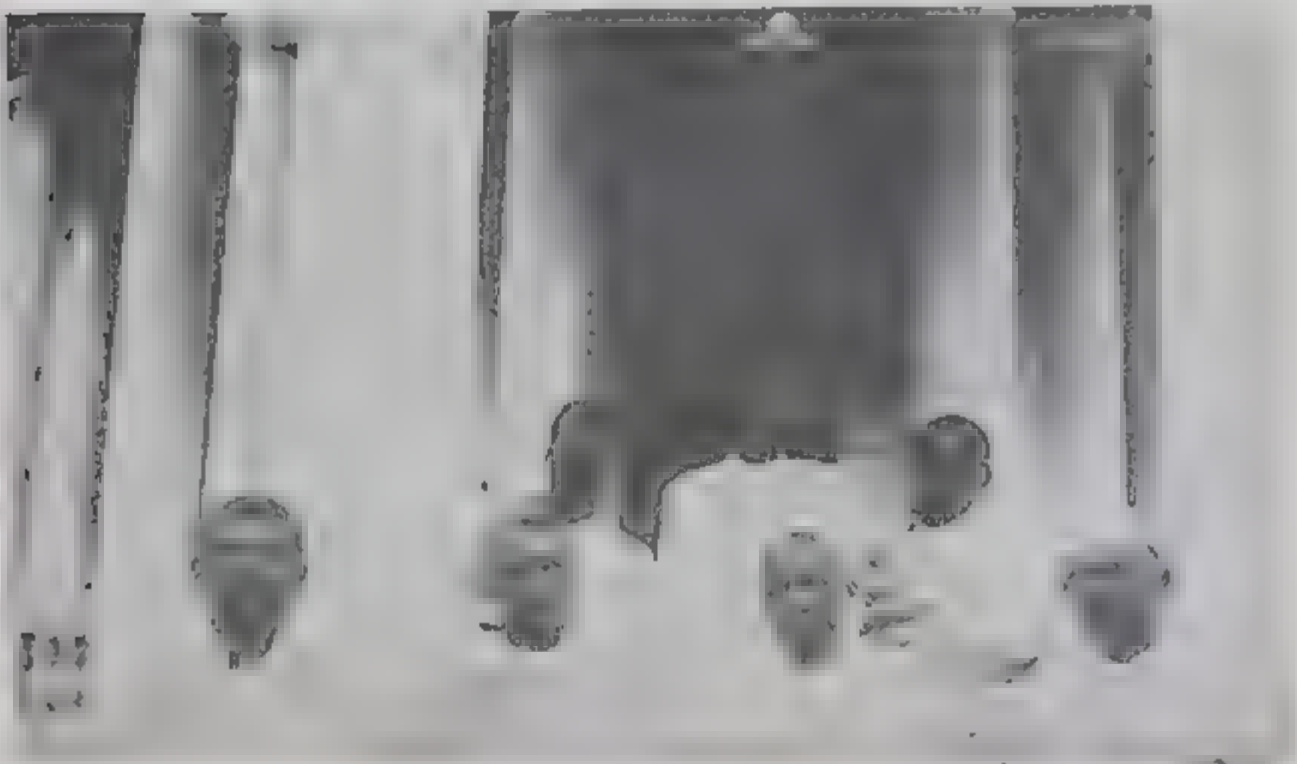
With the Japanese Monk, Fuji Guruji

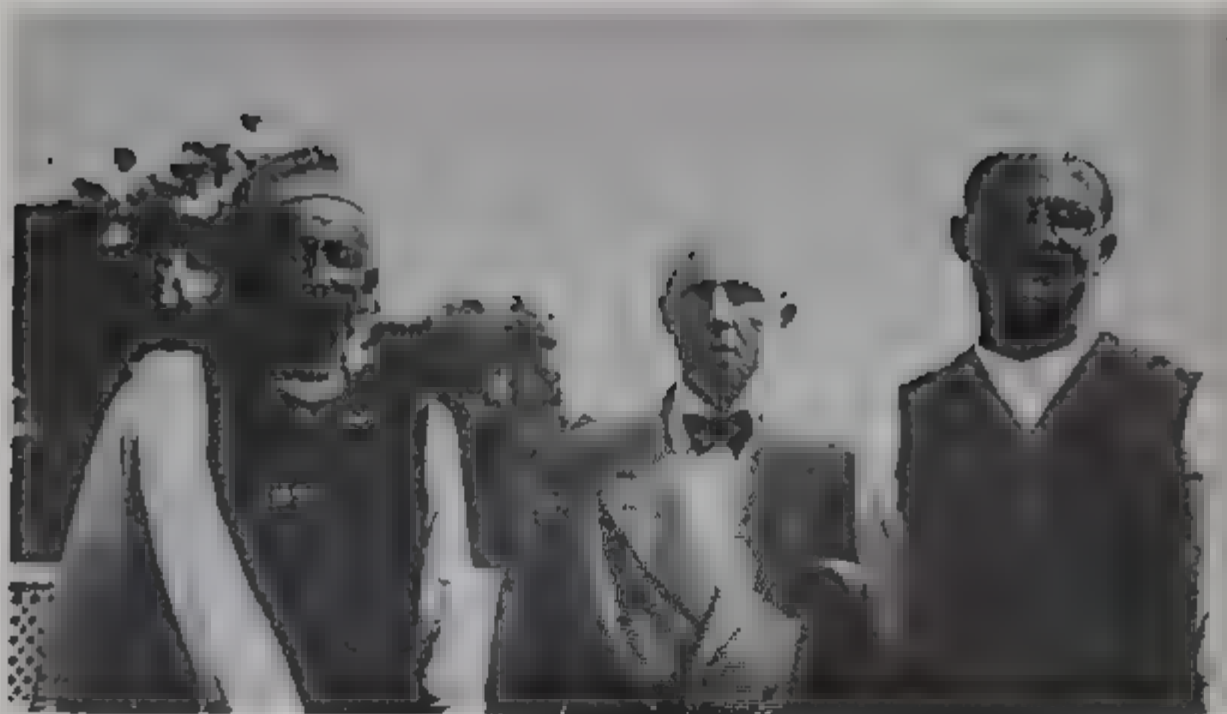




Ghanshyamdas Birla, Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,
Gandhiji, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Devdas, Mahadev

Manilal Kothari, Rajaji, Sardar Vallabhbhai, Mahadev,
Rajaji's son at the back





Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaya, Lord Lothian, Mahadev

Shakuntala with the cow, Rajkumari, Mahadev, Gandhi,
Abha Gandhi, Balwant Singh. Sevagram : 1938





Coming out after interviewing political prisoners '
Dumdum Jail, Calcutta, 11-4-1938



In Delhi : 1939-40



Birlabhavan, Bombay : 1940 —
Gandhiji, Rameshwarprasad Birla, Rajenbabu and Mahadev



Dhiren Amritlal Chatterjee,
Mahadev, Gandhiji, with
artists from abroad, 1940
A round joy



With the Archbishop
of Calcutta : 1940

Amongst the Adivasis





Durgaben Desai, Kasturba, Queen mother of Kalakankar

In a meeting near Ahmedabad ·

Maniben, Kasturba, Gandhiji, Sardar, Mahadev





In Calcutta : 1940



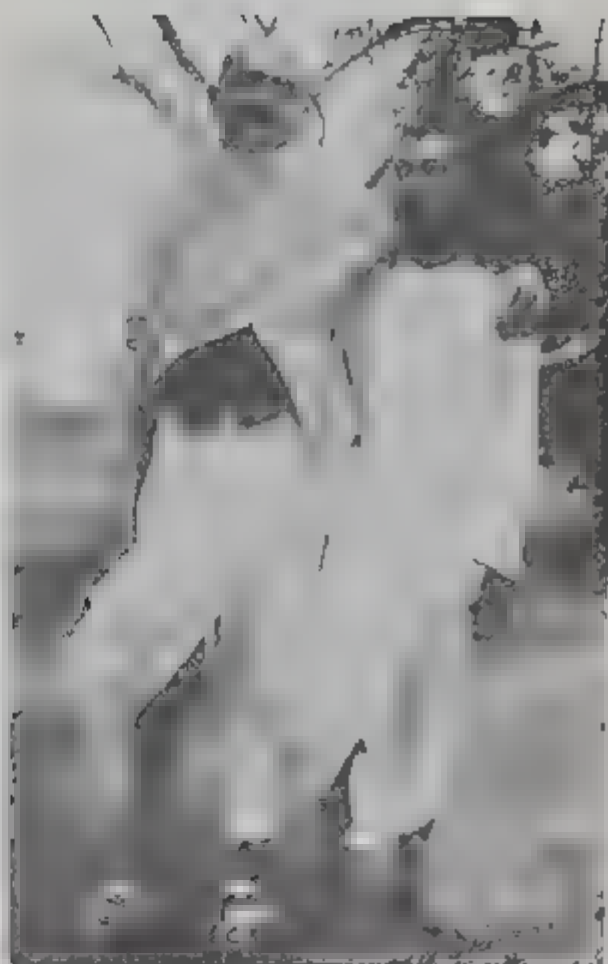
During Travel : Sardar Vallabhbhai, Mahadev, Gandhiji





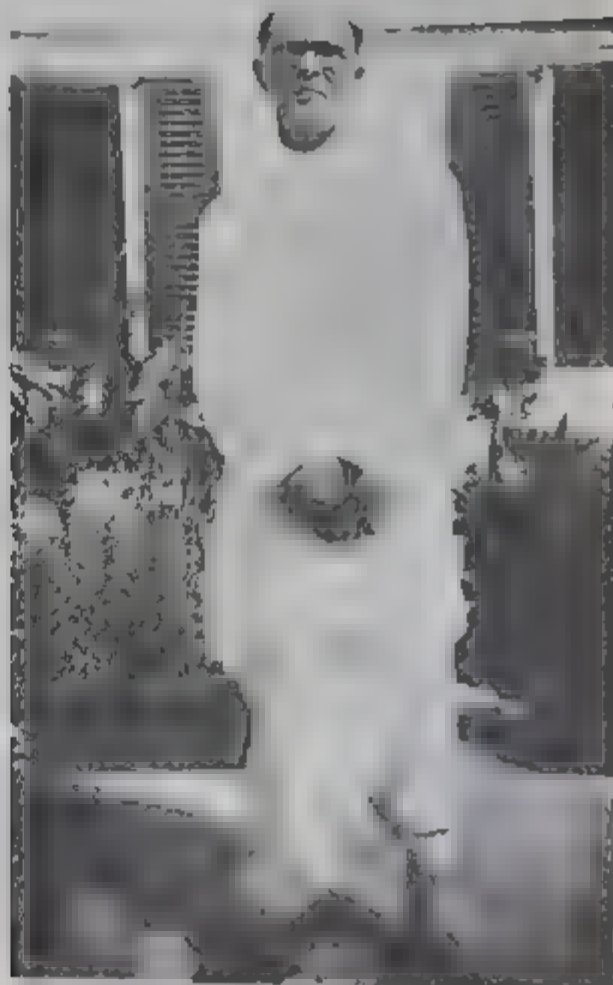
During the pleasant saunter

1891
 May 31





After sickness in Delhi : 1939



During sickness in Delhi : 1939



Mahatmajī's secretaries -
Mahadev and Pyarelal with
Rajendraprasad's son,
Mrityunjayprasad

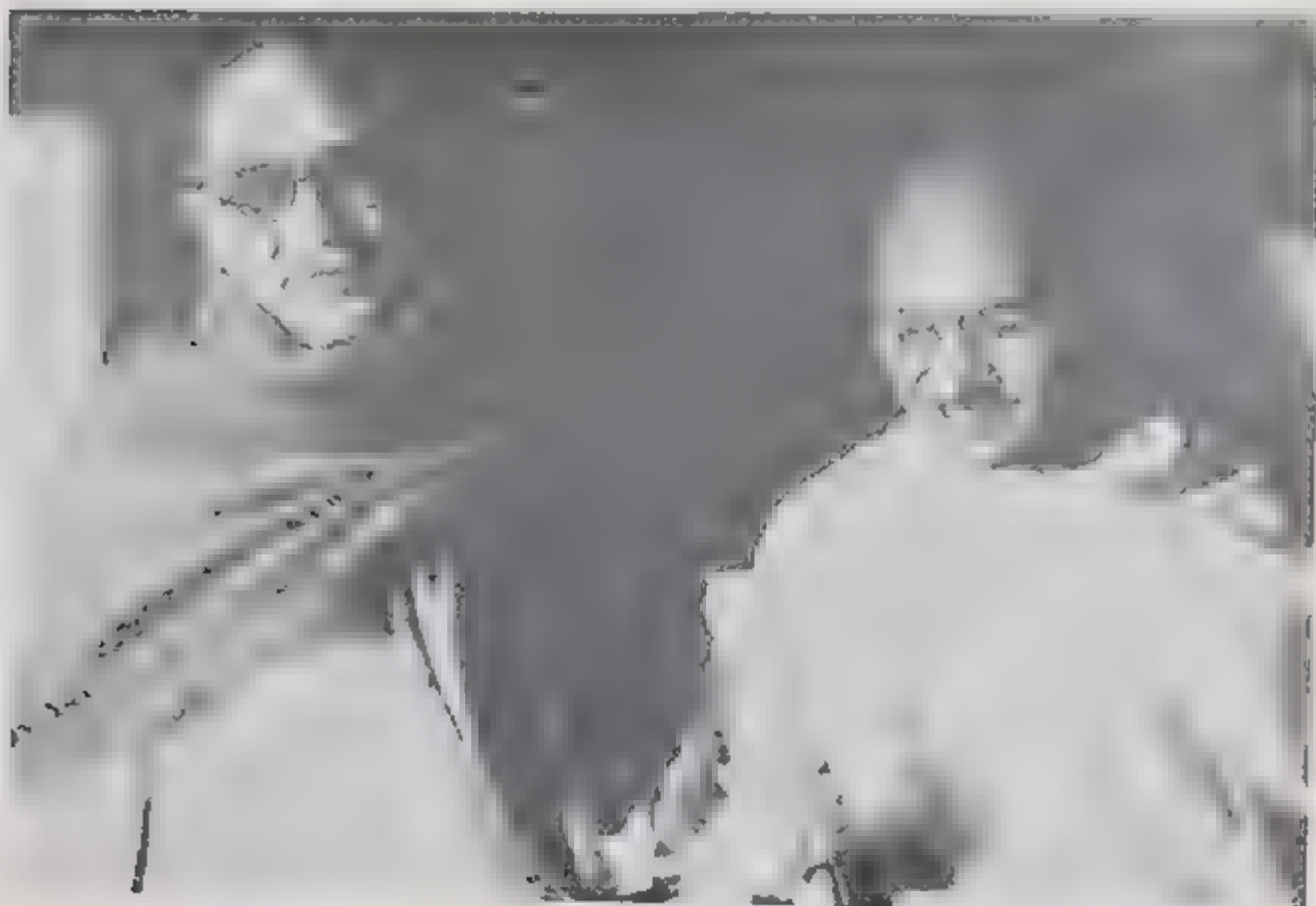


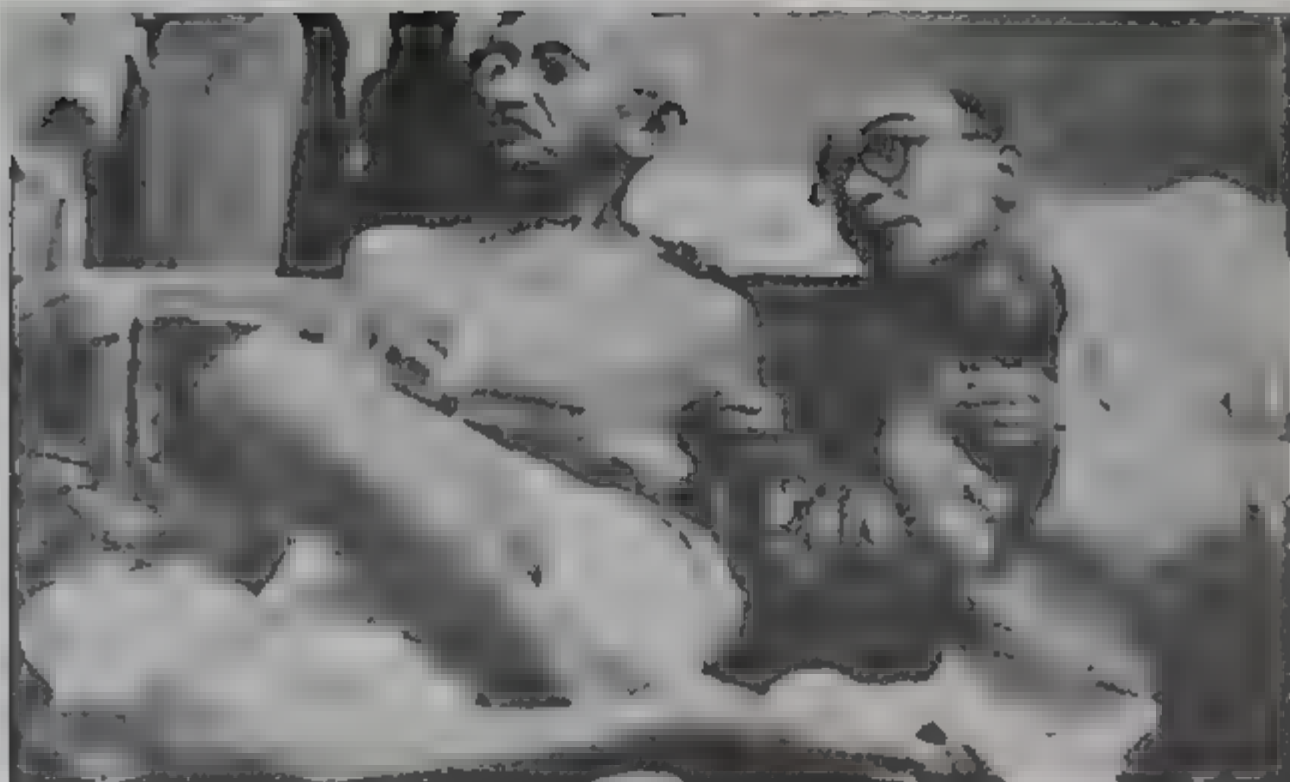
Mahadev and Kakasaheb Kalelkar



An unusual scene during 1940-41

During Congress Working Committee Meeting at Bardoli : 1941





'Quit India' — In the A.I.C.C. at Gowalia Tank, August 1942

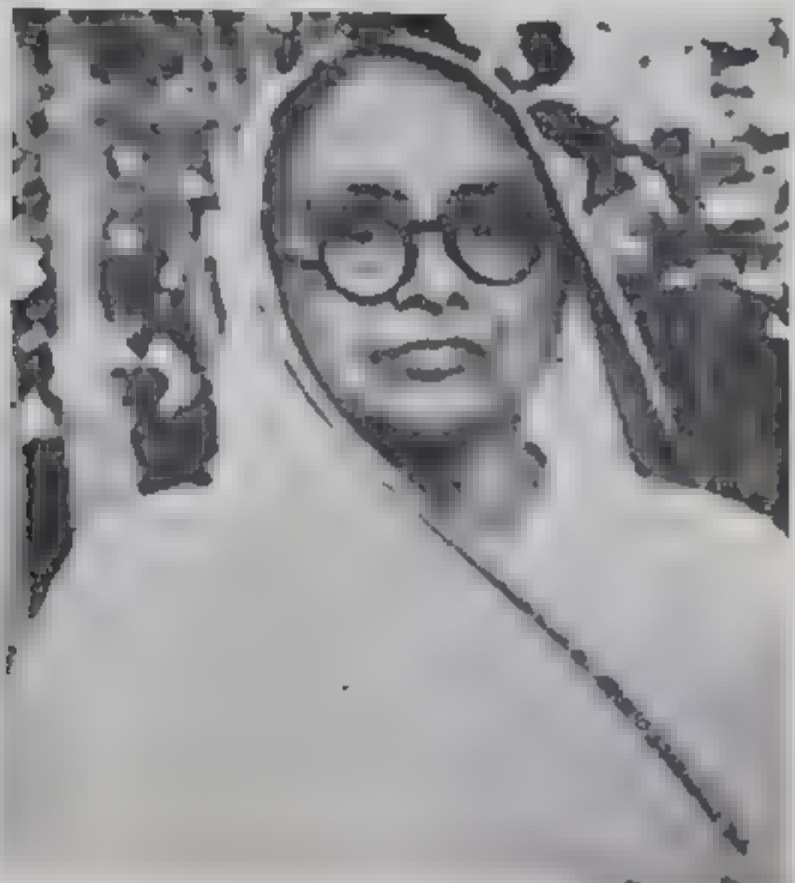
Agakhan Palace, Poona :

Where Mahadev and Kasturba merged with the eternal





Durgaben Desai : 1941



Durgaben Desai : 1955



Durgaben Desai, Irivenben Jagravan Mehta, Maniben Narahari Parikh

Whilst Inaugurating





At the inauguration



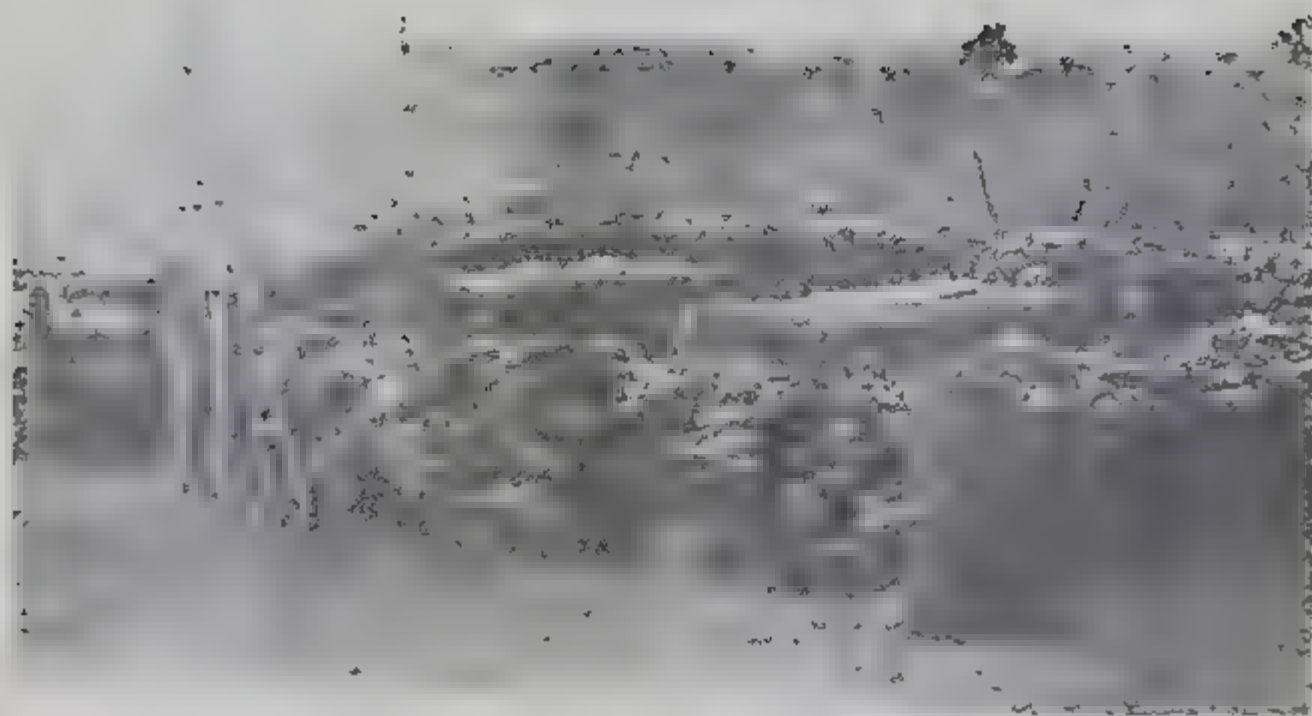
Letter reading whilst standing, at Delhi :
Agatha Harrison, Mamben Patel in the rear



A Sketch : Amrit Bhatt



A Sketch . Manibhai Mistri



Samadhis at the Agakhan Palace : As they were in 1944

Praying at the Samadhi, Agakhan Palace :
Narayan Desai, Manu Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi,
Dr. Sushila Nayar, Pyarelal





Mahadev's Samadhi

✧ — Mahadev's Samadhi
He Ram — Kasturba's Samadhi



MEMORY

You will have to perceive
With your head held high,
In this infinite universe,
Towards the absolute and the lustrous ones.
-And will have to proclaim
With a mind free of doubt.
Oh! the lustrous ones of the Heavenly abode,
We also are children of ambrosia like Thee!

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

How can we understand God's will?
You suddenly left your body.
We feel that in reality you were,
That all-pervading, ever-abiding love.

— *Bhavani Prasad*

CHAPTER I

"MAHADEV, ARISE MAHADEV!"

15th August 1942. Agakhan's Palace near Poona.

Gandhiji dictates a telegram to Dr. Sushila Nayar "Mahadev has died yogi's and patriot's death. No sorrow allowed."¹

The telegram was addressed to Chimanlal Shah, Manager, Sevagram Ashram Durga, Mahadev's wife and Narayan, Mahadev's son were staying in that Ashram. This telegram about his demise in Jail was delivered to Mahadev's near and dear ones by the British Government, after full twenty-two days with a short note, saying, "We are sorry about the delay due to some error in delivery of this letter because of some mistake."

Mahadev's dead body was lying in front of Gandhiji when he dictated this telegram. Flowers, gathered by Miraben from the Agakhan Palace garden, adorned the body which Gandhiji had bathed with shaking hands. He had dried the body with his own towel which he used immediately for himself. He then gave the towel to Sushila and said, 'Preserve this towel. It is to be given to Babla (Narayan).'

Gandhiji told Sushila after bathing the dead body, "Do not give Mahadev's clothes to anyone else for washing. You wash them yourself. Later on they are to be handed over to Babla." In the side pocket of Mahadev's shirt was found an edition of *Bhagvadgita* and in the front pocket a fountain pen. Both were symbolic. *Gita* was the root of inspiration for the noble sacrifice in which Mahadev had offered his life only minutes before. And the flames of that sacrifice had arisen from that pen which was ever present on Mahadev's chest. These two articles portrayed the significance of Mahadev's life. The *Gita* signified the depth of his character, the pen its magnitude.

Later Sushila asked Gandhiji for clarification about his immediate reaction to Mahadev's death.

"Bapu, you did become distressed when Mahadevbhai died, didn't you?"

"How do you deduce this?"

"You were looking at his face and calling, as if distressed, 'Mahadev, arise Mahadev;' weren't you?"

"No, there was no distress."

"So?"

"In my calling there was faith."

"Faith? How so?"

"I felt that if Mahadev opened his eyes and looked at me, I would tell him to get up. He had never disobeyed me in his life. I was confident that had he heard those words, he would have defied even death and got up."

There was every reason for Gandhiji to have that confidence. Mahadev had spent exactly half of his life with him. In that period did he ever disobey him? Did Pandit Totaramji, an old inmate of the Ashram, relate an incident which occurred after about six months of Mahadev joining Gandhiji? It happened thus. Both Mahadev and Pandit Totaramji were sleeping in a small room of a house on Mirzapur Road in Ahmedabad. Suddenly Panditji woke up on hearing a loud sound. He saw Mahadev standing on the adjacent cot. When Panditji asked him, "What happened Mahadevbhai? Why have you suddenly got up?" Mahadev, before lying down once again, demurred in his reply, "I don't know. Maybe I was dreaming. In my dream I felt that Bapu was calling me and so probably I stood up." Since the moment of his joining Gandhiji, till his last breath, Mahadev never questioned Gandhiji's judgment.

The body that was peacefully lying, like that of a meditating *Yogi*, was beautiful enough to charm even Kamadeva. Only a few minutes before his death, sitting in front of a huge mirror in Sarojini Naidu's room, Mahadev had borrowed a pair of small scissors from Miraben and had clipped his nails and clipped his moustache. Once Gandhiji had compared Mahadev to a rose. On hearing that simile Sarojini had honoured him with the epithet '*Gule-Gujarat*' (Flower of Gujarat). That very morning Sarojini had teased Mahadev, comparing him to a bridegroom. It seemed as if in that fine morning Mahadev's favourite song of Kabir, 'Adorn yourself, O clever one! For you have to go to Your Beloved', had become a reality.

A piece of sandalwood found in Sushila's purse, was used for applying paste on the forehead of the charming person who always added joy to life and welcomed death like a *Yogi*.

That soft sound of the chanting of the *Gita* mingled with the fragrance of the incense-stick lit by Miraben.

Gandhiji, who, some minutes before had appeared slightly perturbed, slightly agonised, sat up and joined the Gita recital.

Bhajans from *Ashram Bhajanavali* were sung after the Gita, some of which had been recited by Mahadev himself during their six days' incarceration in the Agakhan Palace.

How and where the last rites were to be performed was the question that was uppermost in the minds of Sushila, Mira, Sarojini, Kasturba and above all Gandhiji himself.

The jail authorities were in a dilemma about the cremation. They could not accede to Gandhiji's request that Vallabhbhai and Kher be allowed to come and discuss the matter with him.

In the meanwhile a truck arrived bringing a Brahmin.

"Brahmin?" Gandhiji pricked up his ears, "Why a Brahmin?"

"To perform any worship, if so desired," said an officer, with his head bent low.

"All necessary worship over here has been done," Gandhiji replied a bit sternly in a slightly raised voice.

Bhandari came to Gandhiji, pushing Sarojini forward. "What is the news?" asked Gandhiji.

"I have arranged everything," Bhandari stuttered.

"What arrangements have you made? Can I hand over the dead body to friends?" Bhandari looked agitatedly at Sarojini. Sarojini clarified "The Government does not want to give the dead body to anyone. Bhandari would himself, cremate it on the ghat."

"Can one of our people go with the body?"

"I am afraid not."

Gandhiji kept quiet. His mind was in turmoil. He remembered that the dead body of Swami Shraddhanandji's assassin was handed over to his relatives after he had been hung. That body was taken out in a procession which was allowed by the government then, even when there was every likelihood of a communal riot breaking out. Today the same government was refusing to hand over the dead body of a person like Mahadev, to his immediate near and dear ones.

The dilemma Gandhiji faced was whether to swallow this bitter pill or fight out the issue with the government. How could he, the upholder of Truth and Non-violence, allow the body of his son to become a political issue.

Turning to Bhandari he asked, "Can I cremate the body here, myself? I had hoped that some day Mahadev would cremate me, now it is I who will be cremating him."

Bhandari was able to contact the authorities both at Bombay and Delhi and was given the permission to cremate the body as desired by Gandhiji. While preparations for the cremation were

going on, Gandhiji chose to wrap Mahadev's body in the coarse sheets available in the jail – as befitting the death of a prisoner.

Gandhiji's message to freedom-fighters – Satyagrahis – was to view the jail as a palace, and now for him the Palace was transformed into a prison. All around the building a barricade had been erected with wooden planks. On one side, the Palace retained its old colour, while the other side was not coloured at all. A barbed wire fence had been erected all around and seventy-six armed constables were constantly on guard. The Government was harbouring a seventy-four year old, lean bodied but 'extremely dangerous' prisoner.

Death freed Mahadev from this bondage. Outside the fence a spot was cleared for the cremation. The fencing had to be cut to enable the cortege to pass through. The bier was made from the branches of neighbouring trees. Gandhiji led the mourners with the flame in the earthen pot, while six persons carried the bier. The others followed in total silence.

A chair was placed for Kasturba, at a distance from the funeral pyre on which the body was placed. Ba was shaken but gave her blessings with folded hands and tears in her eyes. "Mahadev, be happy, wherever you go. You have served Bapu constantly and given happiness to all. May you also be happy," was her constant refrain.

When the arrangements for lighting the pyre had been completed, Bapu went towards the pyre and looked at Mahadev's face. Then Gandhiji himself lit the fire. He who had been the father all his life now performed the duties of a son.

When the fire had cooled, Gandhiji personally collected the ashes, put a *tilak* on his forehead with it and said, "These ashes have to be preserved for Durga." Once again he remembered Babla. Turning to one of the officials he said, "If none of us gets out alive from here, please show this place to Mahadev's son."

From the time of Gandhiji's arrest on the 9th August 1942, all those who had been put into jail with him, found Mahadev to be under great strain. Gandhiji had repeatedly indicated that he would be going on a fast unto death when he was arrested. He would not even take water during this fast. Mahadev did not like this idea at all and had even opposed it. But the discussions had not ended, when they were arrested. The mere thought that Bapu would fast unto death was like a Democles's Sword in Mahadev's mind.

Pyarelal, the co-secretary with Mahadev, believed that Mahadev's death held off Gandhiji's fast. "When everyone's appeal failed to stop Gandhiji from undertaking the fast unto death,

Mahadev succeeded. This is the only incident of its kind in Gandhiji's entire life according to my knowledge."²

In his own way Gandhiji expressed the same thought, "Mahadev's sacrifice is not a small thing. He fully obeyed the call, 'Do or Die'. This sacrifice is bound to hasten India's day of liberation."

For months after the funeral, the only subject of conversation amongst the prisoners was Mahadev – a *Yogi* and a patriot.

Sushila recalled that the ever joyful Mahadev had become very solemn after their arrival at the Agakhan's Palace. Miraben said that Bapu's decision regarding his fast had been agitating Mahadev's mind

Sarojini said, "If anyone has died for someone else, it is Mahadev. Like Jesus Christ, he died so that others may live. What greater service can a man render than give his own life for others?"

In the Agakhan Palace Miraben put up a rectangular structure at the site of the *Samadhi*. On it she made a large ☸ with shells. At the four corners she made the new-moon and star – emblem of Muslims and made a Cross right in the middle.

Kasturba christened this place 'Mahadev Mandir' and Gandhiji made it a rule to visit the *Samadhi* every morning and evening with flowers and to recite the 12th Chapter of the *Gita*. He said, "Mahadev's life was an unending poem of devotion. To think of him, *shlokas* only from the Bhaktiyoga can help."

The government sought to withhold the news of Mahadev's death. They had tried to conceal the fact that Gandhiji and his party were being detained at the Agakhan's Palace. Three days prior to Mahadev's death, the doctor in the jail had prescribed some medicines for Kasturba and had asked the authorities to get them from Poona. The Doctor had written Kasturba's name on the prescription. Mahadev saw it and laughed. He drew Gandhiji's attention to the fact that if that prescription was taken to the Poona market, Kasturba's illness and her whereabouts would immediately be known.

A Satyagrahi does not overcome his opponent through duplicity, but wins him over through love. And so Gandhiji told Mahadev to draw the attention of the authorities before the prescriptions were sent out. The Superintendent, Mr. Kateli, heaved a sigh of relief and never tired of thanking Mahadev again and again for having saved him from committing a blunder.

Throughout this period Mahadev had been thinking about the Movement. He assumed that most probably this struggle would be the last sacrifice for the freedom of India. His own behaviour, he thought, should befit a Satyagrahi, purified by the eleven vows; and

so he would slip away from any talks which implied censure or slander of anyone. Since he did not have much secretarial work in the prison, he washed Bapu's clothes and took upon himself the tasks of cooking and serving the food. He found joy in doing the lowliest task for others. He made a toaster from some old wires. When Gandhiji saw him preparing toast on the toaster, he enquired about the Gujarati rendering of 'Necessity is the mother of invention'.

Mahadev would lovingly serve tea to Sushila and Sarojini. His routine of spinning 500 yards of yarn, reciting the entire Gita and writing the diary was never broken. He breathed his last with his head in Bapu's lap on the 15th morning. His diary was written right upto 14th August 1942.

In the jail prisoners were not allowed to write letters. Gandhiji wrote only two letters in consultation with Mahadev – one to the Governor of Bombay and the other to the Viceroy.

Leaving Bombay Gandhiji had seen a worker named Mehta being dragged like an animal from the train and being thrown in the lorry whilst going to jail. Gandhiji had complained about this in the letter to the Governor of Bombay. He had also asked to be allowed to keep Vallabhbhai with himself in the Agakhan's Palace. Vallabhbhai was a valued colleague and a member of the Congress Working Committee. He was being treated by Gandhiji for some sickness before their arrest.

The second letter was addressed to the Viceroy, in which Gandhiji had pointed out the Government's mistake in arresting the leaders of the country. He had mentioned that he had noticed quite a few false statements and discrepancies in the government notifications for the public in connection with these arrests.

Referring to these he further wrote that the Congress was ready to remove any misapprehension regarding its demands. The doors for negotiations would have remained open had Gandhiji been called for talks after the Congress session – as he desired. But the Government had closed these doors by ordering hasty arrests.

Gandhiji had intended to go on a fast immediately on going to prison. It was Mahadev who had been able to convince Gandhiji that it was necessary to clarify his position through a letter to the Viceroy, before going on a fast.

All the comrades present made suggestions when the letter was being drafted and redrafted. The final letter had been written in Mahadev's beautiful handwriting, and had been sent to the Viceroy on August 14th. At that time Mahadev had been the happiest person amongst all those present. 'Praise be to God; the answer to this letter will not arrive for another two weeks, which means that the fear of

Bapu's fast unto death has been postponed till then.' Mahadev had spent six, almost sleepless, nights in anxiety about Bapu's fast. He slept soundly on the night of the 14th. It was the freshness of this sound sleep which the comrades saw on his face on the 15th morning.

The government had to issue a notification willy-nilly, regarding Mahadev's death. The whole country was taken aback. In spite of strict wartime-censorship, all major and small newspapers of the country gave prime importance to this news. *Janmabhoomi* from Bombay ran a headline of eight columns and said, "His spirit will always spread light." They carried more than one leading article. There was an article with the heading "A greatly successful and greatly enriched soul" — at the end of which was written, "Oh! Almighty, please give strength to bear this grievous loss to your most loved devotee and to us."

The fragrance of Mahadev's patriotism had spread to the farthest corners of the country during his twenty five years of untiring service. The 'Quit India' movement had brought forth a wave of violence in the country, but Mahadev's death evoked a reaction of cold protest towards the government. Many rumours about his death had spread. Some said he was tortured and killed, others said he was poisoned. In short, people from all over the country, rural and urban, expressed their grief in various ways. Not a single city, town or village, was left without either a strike, a procession, a resolution of grief, or a prayer meeting. Copies of resolutions were sent to Durga and many others. Most of all the people wanted to send their messages of grief to Bapu, who was everything to Mahadev. But where was he to be found? Some sent the resolutions to the Government of Bombay but the majority of our countrymen did not know Gandhiji's whereabouts. The country was stunned and angry. People were shedding silent tears. Some courageous newspapers voiced the country's pain in leading articles saying that Mahadev became the purest offering in the sacred sacrifice for freedom. He died a death which will be desired by the greatest individual and yet will bring tears of lamentation. He died in the midst of war. He died fighting relentlessly with all weapons of non-violence, against enemies of freedom and light. He died in the lap of one whom he had considered his Master for his whole life.

Who will not envy such a death? Kantilal Joshi wrote a poem voicing the opinion of the people:

In the lap of eternal peace

Rest your final remains.

With the purifying blessings of that sage,

In the prison which you considered a palace.

Your soul repeating the incantation
Of the freedom of your Motherland,
Happily deported, deeply engulfed
In your self-assigned work.

Most of the leaders of the freedom struggle were in jail. Their tributes appeared in the press after two years. C. Rajagopalachari who had not courted imprisonment, wrote a tribute which was an echo of many hearts. Here is a poignant quote from it:

"For all those who have enjoyed the privilege of intimacy with Gandhiji, it is a tragedy that casts a gloom beyond words. It is a heavy blow for Mahatmaji, heavier even than what it is to the loving wife and the boy left behind. What Mahadev was to Gandhiji cannot be described. He was something like a spare body that worked for him whenever his own took a little rest. Gandhiji is left truly orphaned. Mahadev was not only Gandhiji's Secretary and perfect sound box, he was a tower of strength to those whose love for Gandhiji did not prevent earnest battle sometimes."³

One of Mahadevbhai's comrades was Kishorelal Ghanshyamdas Mashruwala. He was an independent thinker amongst Gandhiji's entourage. He had written an article, "Death – As a Force of Life". Mahadev did not want to publish it in *Harijan* as he thought that the article might encourage indiscriminate 'fasting unto death'. But he kept quiet as Gandhiji had approved it. After Mahadev's death Kishorelal wrote, "While to me, as the writer, it is still a mere idea, providence chose Mahadevbhai to give its fullest demonstration. He did not talk – he just did it."⁴

Someone remarked, "Mahadevbhai died very young." Gandhiji said emphatically, "Mahadev had given up attachment to life. And I have always said that one who gives up the attachment to life, relinquishes the body very easily."

Mahadev had been saying repeatedly, "My only prayer to God is 'please take me away before Bapu' ". He had made this remark on the day previous to his death and had added, "God has never refused my prayer."

One was the continuous thought process of a *Yogi* which made Mahadev extremely anxious to end his life in Bapu's lap. Another one was that of a patriot, which helped him to try to fulfil the slogan of the 'Quit India' struggle, 'Do or Die'. Both these processes merged together on the morning of 15th August 1942.

Gandhiji had refused to accept the contention that Mahadev had lived a short life. He said, "Mahadev's work was over. He had performed in fifty years, tasks, which could cover a hundred years

Why should he live longer? Why should God keep him alive longer than necessary?"

Years ago, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had expressed such faith in a beautiful song. Mahadev in his own inimitable style, had rendered that song in Gujarati:

They worship that did but half remain,
Verily I know, is not in vain,
The flower unbloomed that fell on land,
The river whose stream was lost in sand,
I know at Thy feet they still do stand.
All in life that's left behind,
To it, I knew their act not unkind,
Unknown to us, unheard by us,
I know thy harp doth play it for us.

Let us now review the work that could cover a period of a hundred years, but had been accomplished by Mahadev in a short span of fifty years.

FOOTNOTES

1. Nayar, Sushila, *Bapuke Karavaski Kahani* p. 90
2. Nayar, Pyarelal, *Harijan*, 9-2-1946
3. Rajagopalachari, C., *Harijan*,
4. Mashruwala, Kishorelal, *ibid* 23.8 1942, p.278

PREPARATORY YEARS

Smiling, sincere, incorruptible —
His body disciplined and limber
A man who had become what he could
And was what he was —
Ready at any moment to gather everything
Into one simple sacrifice.

— *Dag Hammarskjöld*

We may become self-surrender Incarnate,
Divinity incarnate,
Humility Incarnate,
So that we can understand this land better,
And love it more.

— *M. K. Gandhi*

CHAPTER II

THE ANTECEDENTS

Arjuna has raised a question in *Dhyānayoga*, the Sixth Discourse of the *Gītā*:

“Without a foothold and floundering in the path to *Brahman* from both, is he indeed not lost, Oh Mahabahu; (Mighty Armed One) like a dissipated cloud ?

“This my doubt, Oh Krishna, do thou dispel utterly; for there is to be found none other than thou to banish this doubt ”

(*Gita According to Gandhi*, Discourse VI, 38-39).¹

Krishna assured Arjuna :

“Neither in this world, nor in the next, can there be ruin for him, Oh Pārtha ! No well-doer, Oh loved one, meets with a sad end.” (vi, 40)²

Reassuring that neither in this nor in the next life does a well-doer faces ruin, Krishna goes on to say :

“Fallen from *Yoga*, a man attains the worlds of righteous souls, and having dwelt there for numberless years is then born in a house of pure and gentle blood.” (vi - 41)³

A spiritually lost soul thus takes birth in a family of a pure and gentle blood.

Mahadev mentions in his own book, *The Gospel of Selfless Action*, that Plato, the Greek philosopher has said about the same thing in his *Apology*: “Know of a certainty that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or in death.” And he also quotes the Koran, “Then whosoever doeth good works and is a believer, there will be no rejection of his efforts Lo ! We record it for him.”

The *Gītā* goes on to further reassurance :

“Or he may even be born into a family of *yogins*, though such birth as this is all too rare in this world ” (vi, 42).⁴

Gītā further says that he (such a person) recovers the intellectual stage and stretches forward towards perfection (vi, 43) and by virtue of previous practice, even with a desire to know *Yoga*

passes beyond the Vedic ritual (vi, 44). But one who perseveres in his striving, cleansed of sin through constant effort, reaches the highest state, (vi, 45) and in the end emphasises that

"Among all *yogins* he who worships ME with faith, his innermost Self all rapt in ME, is deemed by ME to be the best *yogin*."⁵

Mahadev was born into such a rare family of *yogins*

His mother, Jamnaben, died young, at the age of thirty-two. Mahadev was invested with the sacred thread at the age of seven. According to our religious tradition, Mahadev was 'reborn' through this investiture and in the same year his mother died. It seemed as if Jamnaben lived only to bring Mahadev into this world.

Mahadev's father was a teacher in a one-room school in Saras village of Olpad Taluka. Unfortunately, the children of first three or four deliveries did not survive, which made his wife, Jamnaben very unhappy. Jamnaben was blessed with a pious nature, befitting a devotee. In the days before her last delivery, she had engrossed herself in worshipping the Lord. Since the day she came to know about her pregnancy, she made it a point to visit daily, in bare feet, Siddhanath Mahadev's shrine with flowers and *bilva* leaves. From the village there is a straight road of about 2 kilometres in the west to reach the Siddhanath Mahadev temple. Both sides of the road are shaded by trees of Neem, Pipala, Jambul and others. This delightful Shiva temple was built in the times of the Peshwas to enhance the faith of numerous pilgrims, who came there every year. True faith and devotion gave lustre to the temple. Devoted pilgrims from Dihen, Jamnaben's parents' village, came in bullock-carts with bells tinkling, in groups every year. Jamnaben herself had visited the temple a number of times before and after marriage. She must have resolved mentally and prayed, "Oh Lord Shiva! This time please save my child. Considering it as your blessing, I will give the name 'Mahadev' if it is a son and 'Parvati' if it is a daughter. My child will, indeed, be saved, if my devotion to Shankar-Parvati is genuine." Such was Jamnaben's faith. The boy, born to her at 9 a.m. on the 1st of January 1892, the first day of the bright half of Pausha, survived. Although Mahadev's father had taken care to ensure proper medical treatment during pregnancy, his mother was convinced that this was the result of Lord Shiva's compassion. And so instead of christening the child according to the custom of selecting the name astrologically, she insisted on christening him 'Mahadev', and all his life he was known by that name.

How much could Mahadev remember about the mother who left him after only seven years? There was no one in Fogat Falia, his maternal parental home, from whom Mahadev could learn

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something about his mother. The only thing he remembered was that his mother had a very charming face. She was a pious person. She could not tolerate any child being scolded. Without reading any books she had an intuitive understanding about children that they get spoilt if elders frighten them to keep them under control. Mahadev remembered only that his mother made *sheera*⁶ and nurtured him out of her immense love for him. She used to run her house royally, even on her husband's monthly salary of Rs. 15/-.

It was said that Mahadev inherited his build from his father and his handsome looks from his mother.

His father, Haribhai, was 5 ft 11 in. tall, and fair in complexion. His face was lustrous which reflected his internal purity. His eyes portrayed affection, which Mahadev showed in ample measure as he grew older.

Mahadev's grandfather, Surbhai, handed over, as a heritage to Mahadev's father, Haribhai, a life beset with poverty, devotion to the Lord and a great measure of self-respect. Surbhai worshipped Ganapati. Every village and every locality brought the idol at home and worshipped it, and the immersion of the idol was a gala occasion. Even at that time, Surbhai installed Ganapati's idol with full pomp and devotion and subsequently took it for immersion in a procession on the appointed day. He then gave food to those who joined the procession. On that day he put aside his poverty in the face of richness of prayer and devotion. His poverty was such that at times the family had to do without food. He had one ox for ploughing, so with difficulty, he would borrow another ox to plough his field and work the plough himself. But when he could not afford even that, he would plough his land by yoking his two elder sons, Haribhai and Bapubhai to the plough. In spite of his poverty he retained his self-respect. He was known as Surbhai Bhagat in Tilwa Street because of his habit of spending most of his time in prayer.

The street where Haribhai lived with his family in Dihen was fittingly known as Tilwa Street. In the time of Gulabbhai or Mohanji, two or three generations before Surbhai, the Desai family divided itself into two branches. One branch, anxious to get material wealth, went to Taluka headquarters at Olpad, bought some land and kept on adding to it. The remaining branch paid more attention to spiritual wealth, stayed on in Dihen village and came to be known for their worship and prayers. The villagers had named the locality where they resided, as Tilwa Falia, because of various signs of *kumkum* and ashes on the forehead, which are called *tilan-tapkan*. The later generations prided themselves upon the name, Tilwa Falia, though the visible signs had gone. The families which went to Olpad

became prosperous landlords, while those in Dihen did not prosper materially.

Mahadev imbibed cultural refinement mainly from Haribhai. After his mother's death, Mahadev was cared for by his grandmother. She kept a cow, and by selling its milk and *ghee* (purified butter), helped to add to Surbhai's income. She looked after Mahadev, but it was Haribhai, who showered love over him and tried to fulfil the role of both father and mother. As a primary teacher, Haribhai was repeatedly transferred from one place to another. However, he always kept young Mahadev by his side. Haribhai was constantly worried about Mahadev's delicate health, and would have tears in his eyes if Mahadev was even slightly indisposed. But more than his body, Haribhai supervised his education and most of all contributed to the development of Mahadev's character. Surat district was known for its foul language, and the Anavil community was notorious for the use of abusive language. Children speak what they hear around them. Haribhai never used a word of abuse, and did not allow others to use such language in his presence. Only once in his life did Mahadev receive a slap from Haribhai and that was for using abusive language. In his career as a primary teacher, Haribhai was never known to have used the rod, although, 'spare the rod and spoil the child' was a phrase commonly in use in those times, and yet his image as a disciplined teacher never suffered. His presence alone was enough to maintain discipline amongst the students. Though Haribhai's education had been in Gujarati, he was fond of reading Sanskrit books with the help of footnotes or translations. He studied the *Ramāyana*, the *Mahabhārata*, the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* in this way, memorised many of the verses and used to recite them. At times, he also explained the deeper meaning of these verses to his students.

Haribhai wanted his children to be free from bad habits. He himself had none. People around him were impressed by his simple, frank and dignified nature. He had worked at many places such as Takwada (Taluka Pardi), Saras, Adajan, Valsad, Valod and such other places, during his long tenure of service as a teacher. Wherever he went, he won respect and love, not only from his students, but also from the villagers. His memory was sharp and his intelligence keen. His handwriting was beautiful and his reading in Gujarati extensive.

Haribhai's youngest brother, Bapubhai, though not otherwise much educated, was proficient in arithmetic. Mahadev used to say that, had Bapukaka studied enough, he would have become a wrangler in mathematics. Often when teachers of nearby towns, came to Dihen during holidays, Bapukaka, who was a Talati, would

easily solve their problems of higher mathematics, when presented to him in Gujarati.

Haribhai was the eldest of the three brothers. He used to teach arithmetic orally, as he believed that arithmetic textbooks had to be used only by those, whose knowledge of the subject was inadequate. He would formulate problems mentally, when teaching mathematics and arithmetic, and would then have them written on the blackboard. He had tremendous self-confidence as a mathematics teacher. The following conversation between this author (Narayan Desai) and an old inhabitant of Valod, approximately 35 years after Haribhai's death would give us an idea of the respect people had for him.

"Are you Mahadev Haribhai's son?" asked the elder.

"Yes indeed!" I replied.

"I owe a lot of obligation to your grandfather," he said.

"How so?" I asked.

"Haribhai came to Valod as a primary school teacher. I was a student in the Final (Gujarati Std VII, a qualifying examination for being a primary school teacher) at that time. Just three months later, he was transferred elsewhere. Some time later I appeared for my Final examination, and failed. Some days later I met him in Surat. I greeted him and he inquired about my welfare. I told him about my failure in mathematics in the final examination. He immediately said that it could not be, as any student that had studied mathematics for three months under him, could not fail. He took up the matter, paid the fee for re-assessment of my paper and found that I had passed. Had this not happened, my studies would have ended there," concluded the gentleman. How many such self-confident primary teachers can we find to-day, who could claim that no student who had studied under them even for three months, could fail in his subject?

Haribhai was very fond of singing devotional songs (*bhajans*). In the early morning, he would sing *bhajans*, while sitting in his bed. Mahadev inherited this fondness for *bhajans*. Surji Shankarji, a doctor without a degree, had come to the village. He loved music. Mahadev took some training from him in music, and also learnt some classical *ragas*.

After Jamnaben's death, Haribhai married Ichhaben from Eru village in Jalalpur Taluka. Since she was only three years senior to Mahadev, he would address her as Ichha. As youngsters they often played games, like draughts, together. But as he grew up, Mahadev gave Ichhaba all the respect due to a mother. Ichhaben herself was an imposing personality.

Amongst other members of his family, Mahadev's paternal cousin, Chhotubhai, also had a great influence in shaping Mahadev's

personality. Swami Anand has interestingly portrayed him in his article, 'Mahadev's Elders'. Chhotubhai had his father Bapubhai's keen intellect, a strong body, the capacity to bear hardships and the rare presence of mind to find a way out of a difficult situation. Chhotubhai, one of Mahadev's other cousins and Mahadev were invested with the sacred thread at the same time. Though differing in temperament, the cousins were full of affection for each other. Whereas Chhotubhai was jocular and mischievous, Mahadev was not even interested in sports, shy and obedient. Chhotubhai was rebellious. Occasionally Mahadev had to participate in Chhotubhai's daily invented pranks. Chhotubhai always helped Mahadev, when he fell behind or hesitated to launch into some adventure.

An outbreak of plague in Adajan compelled Haribhai to go and stay in Damka village near Hajira. The enthusiastic young men of the village requested the two cousins, who had studied English, to give lectures against the use of alcoholic drinks. Fearless Chhotubhai addressed the audience from the stage, unconcerned about his coarse and aggressive language; but shy Mahadev gave the first lecture of his life, in gentle terms, from behind the curtain. Though different in temperament and style, the cousins loved and respected each other. This affectionate relationship lasted throughout their lives. Each hastened to help the other, though for years their fields of work were different. Chhotubhai came and stayed at Sevagram, for days together, after Mahadev's death. With his sense of humour, he lightened the shock for Mahadev's son, Narayan, brother Paramanand, by narrating various funny incidents of his past life, when even grief-stricken, Durgaben had to smile at Chhotubhai's subtle humour. The beauty was that Chhotubhai's use of humour was meant to relieve himself of the grief of Mahadev's death.

Born into a family, which led a religious, honest, hardworking, simple and clean life, it may be said that Mahadev inherited an excellent seed which flowered into the tree of his later life — a life spent in purification of mind and social revolution.

FOOTNOTES.

1. Mahadev Desai, *Gita According to Gandhi*, (Discourse vi - 38-39), p. 240
2. Ibid. (Discourse vi-40), p. 240
3. Ibid. (Discourse vi-41), p. 241
4. Ibid. (Discourse vi-42), p. 241
5. Ibid. (Discourse vi-47), p. 242
6. *sheera* - an Indian sweet

CHAPTER III

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The idiom "Rare is the privilege of being born in India" does not seem to have emerged out of narrow nationalism. The geography of India is indeed a gift from God to us.

The great and grand Himalayas on one side and the waters of the blue sea on the other three sides, have not only saved us from external attack but have also blessed us with the rivers, the forests and the changing seasons. We have burning sands and heated stones as well as snow-capped mountains all year round. Some areas have rainfall of 2 to 5 centimetres every second year, while others receive an annual rainfall of from 1750 to 2,200 centimetres. Many parts of the country have a temperate climate and are perpetually under a blanket of green. We have inherited a rich variety in nature, religion and language, a wealth of ancient and modern literature, music, art and architecture. Sons and daughters of India have obtained for her a place of honour on the world forum. Undoubtedly, our problems are also daunting, diverse, and complex. Mindful of the fact that India has given this rich inheritance to its people, many of her citizens have accepted the challenge of various problems and have dedicated their lives to addressing them.

Gujarat can lay claim to an exclusive position in this unique country of ours. It has been the 'playground' of two famous Mohans — from the time of Mohan, the Lord of Dwarka to the period of the Mahatma, Mohandas Gandhi. Religious leaders and religious extremists such as Dayanand Saraswati and Mohammed Ali Jinnah and many others were born in Gujarat. This state has produced scientists from Zandu Bhatt to Vikram Sarabhai, men of letters from Narasinha Mehta to Joseph Macwan and types of industrialists from Jamshedji Tata to Kasturbhai Kakasaheb Kalelkar visualised three geographical and social divisions of the people of Gujarat associated with the forests, open fields and the sea, the forest dwellers, the land-tillers and the sea-farers.

The subject of this biography, Mahadev, was born on the Western strip of Gujarat and spent his childhood there. The village of Dihen and Saras are situated a short distance from the Arabian Sea, where the ocean daily presents its offerings to the earth in the form of a variety of conches, shells and cowries. The vast lands nearby are flat and barely two to three metres above sea level. It is said that on a still night, the villagers near Saras, along the Bay of Cambay, can hear the dogs barking in Ghogha.

At the time of Mahadev's birth wheat, Jowar and pulses grew in the flat fields of Saras. A newly built canal today enables the farmers to grow bananas, vegetables and sugar-cane. In every village large, shady banyan trees appear against the skyline like meditating ascetics. At the break of dawn, farmers from Surat district go to thrash the field with healthy oxen from Kankrej. Each village has temples of Gods and Goddesses and in many places, there are mosques. The population of Dihen and Saras has increased considerably over the last twenty years. Kolis and Patels now reside where the Anavils and Brahmins once lived. The latter two communities were mostly farmers but abandoned their lands to go to Rangoon, Bombay and Ahmedabad in search of jobs and trade. They return only occasionally to celebrate religious or social events.

The houses in the villages of Surat district were made of thick mud walls, Indian tiles or plaster roofs with decorated doors at the time of Mahadev's childhood. They were arranged in a row and could withstand more than a hundred years' occupation. Each house consisted of two rooms in the front, the second one being dark, and a room with a kitchen and some open space with Tulsi plants and a bathroom in the corner at the back.

One could see right through the house from the front door. The middle room was generally dark. Mahadev must have been born in the corner of such a room. Years later, in 1925, he visited a darkroom of Porbunder's Prime Minister's house — the room in which his master was born — and wrote with great feeling :

"I visited Bapu's old house with reverence. His birthplace in that house was pointed out to me. When I saw the darkness of that room it felt as if God had sent Bapu to pierce the dreadful darkness."

Mahadev expressed his feelings logically :

"Bapu cannot forget the dire darkness of the crores of poverty-ridden Indian homes which he realises on account of his birth in that dark-room. I saw a new ray of light and hope when I saw that dark-room."

This sentiment may well be echoed on seeing the birthplace of Mahadev himself. One feels that Mahadev had burnt his oil of life to illuminate the lamp of his master.

In fact, Mahadev's birthplace is a matter of contention. Most of the writers or editors of textbooks give his birthpalce as Saras. village. Some people in Dihen maintain that he was born at Dihen. They say that Jamnaben went to Dihen for the delivery in the last days of pregnancy after spending most of her confinement in Saras. On the other hand, there are elders in Saras village today who were boys when Haribhai was a teacher in their village. These people remember Haribhai and point out the house and the room in which they say Mahadev was born.

There is a possibility that any one of the two claims could be right. This author is inclined to accept the claim of the villagers of Saras. The main reason is that Mahadev himself said that he was born in Saras. Narahari, Mahadev's life-long friend has also made this point in his book, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, it is quite likely that he was told of the fact by Mahadev himself. This author relies on the witness of Mahadev and Narahari.

CHAPTER IV

AT SCHOOL

Mahadev studied for the first four years in the primary schools of the village, 'wherever his father was transferred'. Adjusting would not have been difficult for him as his affectionate father at home, was also an excellent teacher

Today there are many high schools in Olpad Taluka, and even a college has been established there. But in those days there was not a single high school and Haribhai was very keen that his darling son, Mahadev, should continue with his studies as he was a bright boy. Even in Surat, the district headquarters, there were only two to three high schools. Haribhai did not deem it proper to keep Mahadev in Surat at this very young age, although he could have asked Dr. Chandulal, his friend in Surat, to keep him there for his education in English. As luck would have it, Manishankar Bhatt, a resident of Dihen, started special classes for English in Dihen itself. Haribhai's problem was solved with the commencement of English classes in Dihen. The special class started very near Haribhai's house as Manishankar resided in the very Tilwa Falia in Dihen. Manishankar as a teacher was very loving, but very strict. He did not spare the rod on dull students. Mahadev never did have to endure a battering, but shook in his shoes when he saw other boys being beaten. Nathu the teacher's nephew, was the daily target of the rod. Chhotubhai did not care about the beating as he had almost become immune to the off and on lashes of the cane. Poor Nathu bore everything quietly, without a tear or an "Oh"! when his uncle went on beating and abusing him. He would make Nathu rub his nose at the wall or bang his head against it and say, "How can I expect you to study, when your father died, making sandal paste in the temple, an ignoramus?" The same Manishankar rolled in the courtyard and cried bitterly for thus beating him when Nathu died some time later, in a plague epidemic.

But *Masterkaka* was very particular in his teaching, especially in teaching grammar and would explain everything very carefully. Manishankar Master used to teach only one class a day to a limited number of students. Most of the students could learn the basics of the English language very well in the three-year course under Manishankar Master. He conducted this private school for thirty years. He had taught English to Shri Dhirubhai Ambelal, a Judge from Dihen, a few years after teaching Mahadev. Manishankar Master used to call his students at his residence in Dihen to review the lessons taught during the day in his English classes, when he would talk about ethics and religion, persuade them to perform the evening prayers, explaining their meanings as given by Nathuram Sharma and then help them with their revision.

Manishankar settled at Rander in his old age. Mahadev maintained a very cordial relationship with him. Even when Mahadev had become famous in the whole country, he always met *Masterkaka* at Rander. Whenever he went to Rander, he would bow down and touch *Masterkaka's* feet which made him feel very humble as he was aware of Mahadev's country-wide fame and his mastery over the English language. Mahadev had edited and published a booklet of *bhajans* written by a saint named Arjun Bhagat known in the village around Broach. He sent this to *Masterkaka* with a line on the fly-leaf, "With respect, to my first teacher of English."

These were the influences on young Mahadev while he was a student at Dihen.

During the summer vacation, Dihen became a holiday resort for many students and teachers living elsewhere. The breeze from the large pond on the Western side made the summer heat tolerable and the evenings pleasant. Manishankar's brother, a teacher in Ankleshwar, was proficient in Sanskrit. He used to gather a group of students, explain the Sanskrit verses of Kalidasa and other poets and thus arouse their interest in Sanskrit literature. Another unofficial tutor was a man called Jivanram Vaidya who lived in Tilwa Falia. His association with religious men had given Jivanram a spiritual leaning. The boys called him *Daji* and listened to stories from the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas from him. When they got time from their agricultural labours, the elders of Dihen used to read the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata from hand-written manuscripts. At the end of the monsoon, plays of *Rāmleela* and religious tales by itinerant story-teller helped to impart ethical and religious education to the children. Mahadev was frequently an eager participant in these sessions.

He was very proficient in English. He knew English better than the boys of the upper two classes, even when he was in the first standard, as he was very attentive. He completed the three years' course in only a year and a half.

Once again, further studies became a problem. His youngest uncle, Khandubhai was working in Junagadh. It was decided to keep Mahadev with him. Another uncle was a *talati* in Lavachha, a village in Olpad Taluka. Bhagwa Dandi port was a mile away from there. A sailing boat used to ferry passengers back and forth from that port to Ghogha. As the contractor of the sailing boat was a friend, the journey from Dihen to Ghogha was going to cost nothing. Six persons, two uncles, an aunt, a friend's wife and daughter, and Mahadev went to Ghogha from Dihen. The luggage consisted of food to last for two days, a tin of castor oil for lamps to protect the eyes from kerosene lamp, pills of dried ginger and jaggery to prevent sea-sickness and the usual clothes and beddings. Mahadev was about eleven years old then. This was his first voyage. The boat left Dandi one evening and reached Ghogha the next evening, instead of the morning, owing to unfavourable winds. The pot of water brought from home broke as soon as Mahadev's party got on the boat and so all of them remained thirsty till they reached Ghogha, as it was a taboo to drink water which was touched by the sailors. Next day they reached Bhavnagar from Ghogha in horse-drawn carriages.

Khandubhai, who was working in Junagadh, Vishwanathbhai, Ramnarayan Pathak's father and Hargovindbhai from Dakshinamurti known as Motabhai, were all Nathuram Sharma's followers and hence spiritual brothers. At the time Mahadev went to Bhavnagar as a boy, Hargovindbhai was the station master at Bhavnagar. He welcomed the travellers from Dihen and arranged for a special compartment in the train. They reached Junagadh after changing trains at Dhola and Jetalsar.

The students carried only a letter from the teacher at Dihen. They were admitted to the fourth standard in the high school at Junagadh, after they had appeared for a test. Being Nathuram Sharma's followers, morning prayers were a must after a bath. Soon after they were made to sit for studies by the aunt, a strict disciplinarian, who first sent them to the *kund* to wash their clothes and gave them rice to clean before cooking it. Chhotu, his cousin, took to washing Mahadev's clothes and allowed him to sit beside the *kund* out of compassion, as Mahadev had never washed clothes and was terribly afraid to go near the *kund*. Aunt was angry when she knew that Mahadev did not wash his own clothes. Mahadev got frightened as Chhotubhai started diving in the *kund*. Once he went

home crying and said that Chhotu would drown as he had fallen in the *kund*. Aunt reached the *kund* at a run and returned home after discovering that the rascal Chhotu knew how to swim. She reported the matter to Khandukaka, who stopped the programme of boys washing clothes at the *kund*. It was decided that the boys would draw water from the well and aunt would wash the clothes. For Mahadev even this was difficult. His hands got scarred, as he had never drawn water from a well. Chhotubhai got him released from that chore too and Mahadev was given responsibility of cleaning all the grain required daily.

Chhotubhai's mischief continued in Junagadh too. He would pluck raw mangoes from the mango trees in the college campus. Once the watchman came suddenly and caught two boys, collecting the raw mangoes on the ground, while Chhotubhai had climbed the tree. With a big jump, Chhotubhai disappeared from the tree. The two boys were taken to the headmaster, and were fined, four annas each. Khandukaka went to the headmaster, to get them excused from the fine, who said, "I know that these boys are not naughty. But I will have to fine them to observe the rules as they were caught red-handed collecting raw mangoes."

Nathuram Sharma's influence made the year at Junagadh, one of strict discipline consisting of daily prayers and religious fasts, on each eleventh day of the lunar calendar as well as a strong dose of castor oil every week.

Surat was selected as centre for fifth standard studies in English for Mahadev.

CHAPTER V

LIFE AT HIGH SCHOOL

Haribhai was transferred to Adajan. He recalled Mahadev and his nephews from Junagadh after the fourth standard, as it was possible to walk down to Surat from Adajan.

Today, Adajan, situated on the opposite side of the river Tapi, has almost become a suburb of Surat. Most of the houses are built of brick and cementing, some having two floors. Marble tiles are also used. Lighting is provided by dazzling electric bulbs and tube-lights. There are restaurants, grocery shops, boarding and lodging houses on most of the main roads. Irrespective of the time of day, loud-speakers blare out songs from old and new films. Television antennae stand out against the sky. The pond smells of dirty water after the monsoon rains and there are slums from the fields to the river banks. Many people now have furniture such as dining tables and sofa-sets. Babubhai Maganbhai Patel lives in the house where Haribhai stayed as a teacher. A new modern house with many amenities has replaced the old house.

Ninety years ago, when Mahadev came to Adajan with his father, it was an independent village. The population consisted mostly of farmers. The house Haribhai had rented was in the Patel Falia. In those days, the houses had mud walls and indigenous red-tiled roofs, and were durable for at least a hundred years. Furniture and furnishings were very sparse. Kerosene lamps were used in general and castor-oil lamps for reading. The people ate clean, home-made food in the courtyards. Early in the morning the sound of hymns being sung rose from the houses which were decorated with mango or *asopalav* leaves. School boys used to dive into the pond and swim happily in its clear water. Mango groves surrounded the village and in the fields grew crops of brinjal, beans and other vegetables. Village people remember that Sardar Vallabhbhai stayed for some days during the freedom movement in Karsanbhai Revabhai's house just opposite the house in which Babubhai

Maganbhai Patel lives today. Babubhai remembers his father telling him how Haribhai had lived in his house.

The three boys used to go to Surat from Adajan through the fields on the river bank and then cross the river by the Hope Bridge. Mahadev studied in Surat High School from 1903 to 1906. Jivanlal Diwan was the mathematics teacher there. Diwan later on started an independent high school in Ahmedabad. Teacher Diwan used to order the village boys to stand on the benches as they used to reach late in winter whilst walking from Adajan to Surat. Mahadev used to stand up quietly on the bench. Diwan Saheb realised within a few days that the new boy was a bright student and had a mild temperament, and so the standing on the bench stopped within a week. In the same school Mahadev had another teacher named Chandravadan Munshi. When reminded of those days Mahadev praised Diwan Saheb for his geometry lessons, just as his students in Ahmedabad did not tire of praising him for his history classes.

Mahadev was not interested in sports or dramatics. Studies had his undivided attention. Haribhai had beautiful handwriting and he had been particular that Mahadev's handwriting also should be neat, and legible. He was always particular that Mahadev did not go to school without doing his homework. Mahadev himself had such an interest in studies that he seldom forgot to do his homework. His horizons of knowledge widened on his entering the high school. He showed interest in the various incidents of school as well as of society. And so, at the tender age of 15, when he had passed his matriculation and was in the first year of college, Mahadev attended the stormy Congress session, held in Surat in 1907. Today's youth may find the age of 15 rather a tender age to attend annual sessions of reputed organisations like the Congress. But Mahadev was a bright collegian; and we should not forget that he had become conscious about national problems and was being drawn towards both spiritualism and politics. Spiritual attitudes were implanted since birth, and the seeds of patriotism were sown when he was at the high school. Whilst in high school at Surat, Mahadev came into contact with a leading personality of his caste, Dayalji bhai Nanubhai Desai. Years later, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had called Dayalji bhai the 'Lion of Surat', because of his courage, patriotism and attitude of renunciation. It is possible that Dayalji bhai's influence drew Mahadev's attention towards national questions. It was at his suggestion that Mahadev started reading Vivekanand's writings during his college years, which led him to a deep study of the entire literature about Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Surat was affected by the national movement in 1905 when the Swadeshi movement was in full swing in Bengal. Thirteen years old

Mahadev insisted on using Indian goods as it was understood then, and persuaded his co-students to do the same. The period of high school education is one of late childhood and adolescence. This period is very important for any individual, and for Mahadev, a soft-hearted, sensitive, brilliant young man, it had to be a period for decision. How could it be otherwise? Mahadev later told his friend Narahari of an experience he had, in his adolescence.

"He could not be totally saved from the vulgar and depraved elements in the village atmosphere. People used to earn some good money by selling milk and vegetables in the town, as the land was rich and fruitful. But along with money, the vicinity of the town brought in the rottenness too. Some boys would acquire bad habits from their visits to the town and boast about their exploits. Gossip was rampant about deserting their wives, bigamy and such unnecessary acts. When gay, pleasure-loving people from Surat came to enjoy the feasts of parched grains in particular seasons, they brought some city-rot with them. The innocent minds did get affected, though the boys did not quite understand many of the things that went on. Once a boy arranged to take Mahadev to some girl. As it was the hot season, members of Mahadev's family were sleeping on cots in the courtyard. That boy came to call Mahadev. But Mahadev could not pluck up the courage to get up at night and go with the boy, saying, 'I am not coming, as I am feeling very sleepy.' Thus his lack of courage saved him. Mahadev had said, having remembered this and some other unfortunate incidents: 'It was only my good fortune and God's infinite grace that saved me from all those immoral acts, in spite of living amidst them.' "

God's grace and the fear of wrong doing have saved Mahadev on more than one occasion. Vinobaji has quoted a sentence from the Vedas and has said that 'man's vices are ultimately the shadows of virtue'. His reserve and timidity became virtues for Mahadev and saved him from wrong-doing.

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE

At thirteen years of age, Mahadev was married to Durgaben, according to the custom prevalent in those days. She was younger to him by about 13 months. The marriage was performed simply at Kaliawadi near Navsari, most probably on 23-4-'05. It was according to the customs prevalent among Anavils, unlike the expensive pomp and show prevalent in Anavil marriages today. Attention of many research scholars has been drawn towards the Anavils living in the area from 'Tapi to Vapi' — the old Surat District and the present Surat and Valsad Districts. Some Anavils have written treatise to preserve the importance of Anavils and to eliminate some deficiencies from their community. We should not allow truth to be overlooked in the torrent of praise and so it should be noted that Haribhai had not escaped the custom of dowry, which had destroyed many parents of Anavil girls and which had been the cause of the disrepute of the community. He had taken a dowry of Rs. 600/- from the girl's parents. In those days, Haribhai did not have ideas of social reform, and indeed it was doubtful whether 13 years old Mahadev had even thought about it.

Friends heard about the marriage anecdotes only from Durgaben. She confided in Narahari and Maniben, her closest friends. Narahari has related the incident in his own inimitable style in his book, *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharitra* :

"Durgaben was about a year younger than Mahadev. Her father, Khandubhai Lallubhai Desai was a Deputy Inspector in the Education Department and Durga's parental home was in Kaliawadi near Navsari. Mahadev's family was a poor but noble family. Being in the Education Department, Khandubhai found out from his school all about the boy. All his teachers said that the boy was brilliant and handsome. Before Durgaben could be charmed, her father was charmed the moment he saw Mahadev. Overlooking the facts of their material condition,

putting his faith in his own feelings that the boy would enrich the house Khandubhai decided upon the marriage. Khandubhai was the disciple of Nrisinhāchārya, the founder of the Shreya-Sadhaka society. Many officers of the government and Municipal department used to attend their programmes. His family was known as the *Bhagat* (devotee) family. Khandubhai was a devotee in the real sense of the term. Durgaben had read in her childhood books from the Shreyas-Sadhaka society and of other devotional songs, though she had studied only upto Gujarati sixth standard."

We will see later that Mahadev also had a deeply devotional frame of mind. Thus unexpectedly, without any particular selection, a worthy couple was united.

"We had our two sisters-in-law in our carriage whilst going to Dihen from Surat after the marriage" was what Durgaben said. She was feeling embarrassed at the manner in which Mahadev, a clever conversationalist and quick at repartees, joked all the way with his sisters-in-law. They said, 'Why did you marry, when you said you would not? Why did you go through the ceremony when you had said you would run away?' Mahadevbhai said, 'I was not going to marry, if I did not like the girl: Why should I refuse or get up when I liked this girl?' He joked and made fun of the two ladies during the entire journey. Durgaben felt it was coarse and impolite to indulge in such rustic jokes, as she was brought up in the chaste atmosphere of Shreya-Sadhaka society. On reaching home, which was a mud-house, she thought it belonged to some lower caste people, when she was asked to get down from the carriage. This was the first impression. That impression was totally erased when she experienced the cultured atmosphere and the affection of all her in-laws.¹

Mahadev used to tell his close friends with some delight, amusement and pride, that all the girls offered to him before his marriage were named Durga.

Conjugal life did not begin immediately on marriage when it took place at a tender age. Durgaben was one who was mainly affected by the marriage. She stayed mostly in Dihen with her in-laws instead of with her parents in Kaliawadi. In the first few years at her in-laws' house she used to have a lot of chores like grinding, pounding, cleaning and drawing water from the well. She was a pet of her parental home, being the youngest child. In the new position, she had a mother-in-law only four or five years older than her. And added to it was the responsibility of looking after Mahadev's two younger brothers. She got all the training for the duties of a

housewife long before Mahadev started as a householder at the age of 18/19.

FOOTNOTE

1. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharit*. Guj. pp. 23-24

CHAPTER VII

AT THE UNIVERSITY

The years between fifteen to eighteen in a boy's life are often crucial in his development. During his adolescent years, Mahadev lived in the hallowed atmosphere of Bombay University, having been released from the cocoon of his home in Dihen village of Surat District. His horizons widened, as these years became a definite foundation for his future life.

Mahadev was being trained to become a national citizen during this period. He passed his matriculation at the age of fourteen, only an year before the Bombay University disallowed students below the age of 16 years to appear for the examination. He stood first in his high school. Yet in spite of this he was ignorant of worldly ways. He had to go to Bombay for the examination, as in those days even Surat was not an examination centre. He stayed, while at Bombay, with his cousin. One day, whilst returning from the examination, he lost his way and when after trying for some time, he could not find it, he started crying. Ultimately, a police-constable brought him home.

Initially some difficulty was experienced even for the college admission. This was due to his virtue and not due to its weakness.

At that time Mahadev's father's salary was Rs. 40/- per month and he had reached Valsad after a number of transfers. Thus it was not possible for Mahadev to get his expenses for his study in Bombay from his home. His good marks in the matriculation examination got him his admission in the Elphinstone College rather easily. He had applied for a place as a free boarder in the Gokuldas Tejpal Boarding and was fully hopeful of getting a place, but there seemed to be about ten days gap between the answer to that application and the opening of the College. So he had to stay in the Elphinstone College Hostel. Mahadev was shocked at the opulence, the utter waste in food, the contemptuous treatment meted out to the servants and money being spent recklessly by the boys staying there. He could not eat, as the thought of his father, troubled him. How

could he burden him, who had a big family and a small pay, in this way? He knew what his parents ate at home. He also knew his father's keen desire to educate his son. If it had become necessary he could have even sold his land to give Mahadev a college education! But how could Mahadev go in for such an expensive education? On the first day he did not eat properly, spent his night without sleep and in tears. He hardened his heart and dragged out the ten days with difficulty only on the hope of being a free boarder in the Gokuldas Tejpal Boarding. His hope was fulfilled and he was admitted to the boarding. Moreover, he also got a college scholarship and so the question of burdening his father did not arise.

Mahadev had to go through similar vexation, two years later, after passing his Intermediate Examination. The freeship available from the boarding, provided for boarding, lodging, clothes and half the fees of a college in Bombay that had the lowest fee-structure. The expenses for transport, i.e. local train or tram fare, books as well as tea and snacks were covered by the scholarship. In the Intermediate Examination his rank was one lower than that required for the scholarship. Mahadev never informed his father about this situation, as he was sure that his father would insist on his continuing his studies at any cost. He was in a terrible dilemma. No feeling could remain unexpressed on Mahadev's crystal clear face. Vaikunthbhai Lallubhai Mchta, Mahadev's close friend from the day he joined college, understood his dilemma. Vaikunthbhai respected his brilliance and also knew about his family's financial position. He quietly went to his father and said, "In our class there is a brilliant boy coming from a poor family. He would lose his scholarship by only one rank. He would get it if you give me permission to refuse the scholarship, to which I am entitled." Lallubhai was as generous in heart, as he was rich in worldly wealth. He gladly gave permission to his son to refuse his scholarship in Mahadev's favour. Without telling anyone, even Mahadev, Vaikunthbhai gave up his scholarship. Years ago Lallukaka himself had given up his own scholarship to help deserving co students. In the same year a lady student had also given up her scholarship. *The Elphinstonian*, the College Magazine, referred to Vaikunthbhai's gesture and stated, "Miss Patel and V. L. Mchta have acted in a praiseworthy manner by giving up their scholarships for needy and deserving students." Since then Mahadev's friendship with Vaikunthbhai, extended to Sir Lallubhai's entire family. Mahadev addressed Sir Lallubhai as 'Lallukaka' as did his three sons, and Lallubhai also considered Mahadev as one of his own sons.

Another reason for Vaikunthbhai's friendship with Mahadev was that both of them also found pleasure in regular walks. Very

often Vaikunthbhai walked with Mahadev to College or returned from there with him and on the way the friends exchanged views on various topics. But Vaikunthbhai's reminiscences about those friendly days laid more emphasis on Mahadev's excellence of character than on his knowledge or intelligence. He says :

"The experiences of college students regarding each other are both sweet and bitter. But I do not remember having heard a single harsh or bitter word from Mahadev, during my four years' companionship with him in the Elphinstone College."¹

Vaikunthbhai further says :

"Seriousness was the main feature of his character from the start. I do not suggest thereby that he lacked the sense of fun that is found amongst students. But I never saw in him the tendency to talk badly of professors or students, nor the spirit of unhealthy competition in games. Whenever I had occasion to talk with him, I found that he was interested in speaking about his studies and about national problems. His liking for conversation was his natural gift, but he attained proficiency in it gradually as his personality developed."¹

Another close friend of Mahadev was Sayed Abdulla Brelvi, who later on was the Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*. Shri Brelvi, being a journalist did not participate directly in the national movement. But he was deeply interested in national activities. He was responsible for handing over the management of *Young India* to Gandhiji. The friendship between Brelvi and Mahadev begun during college days, went on flourishing throughout life. Brelvi was one of the leading citizens who wrote a leading article about Mahadev after his death, in spite of the strict censorship of the Government. Through this article, he let the people of India realise the great loss that Gandhiji suffered by Mahadev's death.

Apart from these two, Shri Kanaiyalal H. Vakil, an art-critic of the *Bombay Chronicle* and Shri Alreja, later on a lawyer at the Bombay High Court, were Mahadev's friends. The friendship between Vaikunthbhai, Brelvi and Mahadev was a life-long friendship, strengthened by common interests, values and intense patriotism.

Mahadev realised that he could not afford to be friendly with students who were extravagant, wasteful, pleasure-loving and rude and bullying with the servants, when he entered the Elphinstone College Hostel. At the same time, he intuitively realised, in the College class-rooms, that "there was an abode of knowledge, which he had to acquire through discretion and self-effort. He himself had to take down notes of the lectures; find out books from the library on new subjects to satisfy his ever-growing hunger for knowledge;

identify professors from the college faculty who would guide him. Mahadev had entered a college which had produced extraordinarily learned men such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Phirozshah Mehta and Govardhanram Tripathi. This was a rare chance for Mahadev. He jumped at it as he was studious and disciplined where other tempting interests were concerned. This helped him in his intellectual development. He had a natural interest in Gujarati, English and Sanskrit literatures. During the four years of College he had read almost all the Gujarati books published till that time. He often wrote articles, poems and essays in both Gujarati and English. Once he wrote a poem in English for the College monthly, *The Elphinstonian*. His professor of English called him, praised his poem and advised him to desist from writing poetry till he was inspired to do so after reading a lot and studying writings of well known English and Gujarati poets. Taking the professor's advice to heart, understanding its seriousness, Mahadev desisted from writing poems at that time. He did write some *bhajans* after he left college. But Mahadev's immortal work were the translations of poems by Bengali and English poets. A tremendous work load in other fields later on, prevented him from writing original poetry. The few translations he did were indeed perfect. During his college career, Mahadev read extensively about various subjects apart from the literary ones in which he was deeply interested. Moreover, he would always participate in discussion between fellow-students, during walks, regarding problems besetting India. He had become interested in politics and so he attended the Congress session at Allahabad during his last year at College, just as he had attended the Congress session in Surat during his first year. In neither does he appear to have made any personal contribution. Nevertheless, his interest in politics became evident from the fact of his trip all the way from Bombay to Allahabad at the age of eighteen and that too when he was in the final year of the College.

Mahadev took philosophy as the optional subject in B.A. in spite of his extensive reading of poetry, dramas and novels. He was interested in all the subjects that were useful to the individual and society, but his mental frame was spiritual. His bosom friend, Vaikunthbhai, corroborates this and says :

"Mahadev was religious-minded from the beginning. There is no reason to suppose that this religion-mindedness was aroused by his study of philosophy. But there is no doubt that it was strengthened by his deep study of the subject. His life was fully enriched by the opportunity he got, in the course of his college studies, of reading and understanding the systems of philosophy of different countries, and he passed on the benefits

of his study to the people.”²

Acquisition of knowledge did not end with the four years of college. How could Mahadev's search for knowledge stop, when he was living in close proximity to an ever-developing personality? The search continued amidst the daily load of work; the culmination of which can be seen in 'My Submission', an extensive Preface to an English translation of Gandhiji's *Anāsaktiyoga* with his own comments on it.

Vaikunthbhai's statement about Mahadev's inherent religious nature was very correct. He had imbibed that quality from his mother's milk and father's teaching. He had ruminated in his childhood, over stories from the Vedas and the Upanishads. From his elders he had heard stories from the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. He learnt discipline as well as ethical and moral values from his elders who were disciples of Nathuram Sharma. But the one man who left a lasting impact on Mahadev's character was Purushottam Sevakram Bhagat from Godhra, who was popularly known as Bapji. When Mahadev was in his last year at school at the age of thirteen, Haribhai was transferred to Valsad. Bhagatji, as Bapji was sometimes called, occasionally stayed for a week or two at Valsad when he visited Haribhai's friend. When Mahadev went to Valsad for the vacations, he joined the groups which sang *bhajans*. Both Haribhai and Mahadev were fond of *bhajans*. During college days Mahadev used to go to VasANJI Park at Dadar in Bombay whenever Bhagatji came there. He used to meet Bhagatji off and on even after he joined Gandhiji. Mahadev wrote in an article in *Navajivan* after Bapji's death :

During my college days I had some inkling of spiritual life, through the books of Swami Vivekanand and then through them, of the personality of Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. I found in this saint a second edition of the Paramhansa. I could understand the deep essence of the saying of Ramakrishna Paramhansa through the words that came out of this Saint's lips.... For at least some time I stayed with him continuously and then had his *darshan* once or twice a year. During the period of this contact, I saw him so absorbed in one incessant round of hymn-singing and talks about the Divine and so detached from the body, that I have hardly seen anybody else who had attained to his state.”

“To that imperishable heaven those enlightened souls go, who are without pride and delusion, who have triumphed over the taints of attachment, who are in tune with the Supreme, whose passions have died, who are exempt from the pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain” *The Gospel of Selfless*

Action, Discourse XV-5.

"He was as far as I could see, the perfect embodiment of qualities described above."³

Mahadev became intimate with Swami Anand for the first time at Vasanti Park where he had gone for Bapji's *darshan*. Gandhiji was then in Bombay. Swami Anand had described this meeting in his love-drenched, inimitable style in his article about Mahadev, captioned "Shukra Tārak Samā"

Mahadev writes that Bapji had attained the state of single-minded, strife-free, love of God, through devotion. His own devotion became stronger by the purifying contact with Bapji from Godhra and it could be said that this contact became, in future years, the means of Mahadev acquiring limitless humility for the sake of dedicating himself at Gandhiji's feet.

In his article Mahadev says, "As he sang this hymn of Ramarasa, he himself used to be so intoxicated, so deeply absorbed and overpowered that I have rarely seen anybody else in such ecstasies."⁴

Different people give tributes to the same person in public meeting, in different ways. If we know the people paying tributes, intimately, we would realise that the individual who pays tribute, by and large, eulogises the same quality in the departed soul, which he himself prizes most. Mahadev expressed his own craving for humility by paying his tribute to Bapji through the line, "The humble are loved by the Lord". The desire, "Do your very best in human exertion and yet break away from the physical bonds, in this very life", may have been responsible for his death at fifty years — fifty years which accomplished the work that could cover a hundred years. In the article "Shukra Tārak Samā", Swami Anand refers to the word *Yogabhrashta* (fallen from abstract meditation), and says,

"An exalted being, suddenly cut down in midway, in a life of human effort, is born in this world with Divine excellence and goes away in a short time, accomplishing incredible success. Brother Mahadev must have come on this earth to fulfil some incomplete task, himself equipped with many Divine attributes."⁵

Such Mahadev passed his B A examination with first class in 1910. He chose the subjects of Philosophy and Logic for his B A.

FOOTNOTES

1. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, pp. 18-19
2. *Ibid*, p. 25
3. *M.D.'s Diaries*, "Day to Day with Gandhi" - 8, p. 312
4. *Ibid*, 316
- 5., Swami Anand, *Santo-nā-Anuj* (Guj.) p. 140

CHAPTER VIII

LEGAL PRACTICE, VARIOUS JOBS, SEARCH FOR DIRECTION

Every student starts thinking of what to do after finishing college. A brilliant student has many alternatives. One who ponders over the difference between the blissful and the pleasurable, undergoes an inner conflict. Mahadev was brilliant, as well as an introvert

An incident which put his spiritual strength to test occurred in the later part of his educational career. After his B.A., when he was mapping out his future course, he thought of doing M.A., as he was keen on studying Shāṅkar Bhāṣhya through the medium of Sanskrit. But when he came to know that he would have to offer Rāmānuja Bhāṣhya for M A , which was the prescribed course for that year, he gave up the idea and registered for LL.B. To avoid being a financial burden to the family, he took up a job. He got a job which paid Rs. 60/- per month in the Oriental Translators' Office, as he had a first class at B.A. In the Law College, D. A. Mulla was the Principal of the Law College and Mukund Rao Jaykar, later known for his acumen in political negotiations, was the professor of Hindu Law.

In the final days for LL.B. Exam Mahadev was absorbed in his studies late at night. As he had to appear for an examination the next morning, he put away the books, switched off the light and went near his bed, when he saw someone lying in it. A lovely girl had taken possession of Mahadev's bed, having been infatuated by his charming personality. Mahadev sensed her motive, only when she tried to tempt him by a smile, noticing him to be shocked. The whole episode was crude and one-sided, and there was no question of Mahadev being tempted. The only question was the removal of that girl at midnight, from his room, without her being disgraced, more so as he knew her and she was also related. With great difficulty Mahadev persuaded her to do the right thing. The girl quietly slipped away. But Mahadev could not sleep ! The next day's paper was on Equity. Mahadev knew the subject well. But he was feeling dizzy when he reached the examination hall, and felt as if

everything was going round. He could not concentrate at all. At last, he left the paper half-way and came out after sitting for some time in a dizzy state. The friends at home thought that perhaps the question paper must not have been to his liking when they saw his dejected face. But before they could ask him the reason for coming out so early, Mahadev started crying loudly. The friends were stunned. Chhotubhai consoled him in his own crude but loving manner, "Why are you crying thus, like a school boy? Aren't you ashamed? What will people say about you? You can appear again. You don't have to answer anyone when you don't ask for money from home." At last Mahadev calmed down with difficulty, but he could not reveal the real reason for his behaviour. At that time, Durgaben was not in Bombay, he felt slightly relieved only when he related to her on her return, how he had to pass through that acid test. That year he could not clear the LL.B. Next year, he related this episode to his very close friend, Narahari, who used to study and sleep in his room. No one got a first class that year in LL.B., but it was found that Mahadev had secured the highest marks in Equity in the University!

Mahadev joined Gandhiji, finally in November 1917. During these four years, he took up jobs at various places. This enabled him to send his father some nominal help instead of being a burden to him. When we look into these years of change and selection of jobs to achieve his aim, it is evident that the stimulating force behind it all contained filial service, self-expression, craving for the development of his inner self and a search for a spiritual path rather than financial gain or fame. These four years proved to be the starting point of the erection of the sacrificial hall and the altar on which he was going to offer the remaining half of his life.

Mahadev left the Oriental Translators' Office in June 1915. This five-year period of service served as steps towards personal development. His beautiful handwriting became more mature, his swiftly written diaries are legible even today, 50 years after his death. The major part of the work in the Oriental Translators' Office was the translation of pamphlets, booklets, or books which could be proscribed and confiscated by the Government. The work was comparatively light, as it often is in government offices. But Mahadev never tried to shorten his day by spinning out his workload. He would always go and help his colleagues as he would finish his work in half of the allotted time. He read intensively when there was no work to be done.

A book named *Herbal Medicines*, by Mohanlal Pandya was amongst the material Mahadev had to examine. It contained some instructions on bomb-making and so he put it under 'Objectionable'. The Government of Bombay immediately proscribed it.

The very famous book, *Gītā Rahasyā*, by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, completed during his prolonged imprisonment in Burma, was brought for Mahadev's inspection in its manuscript form. Mahadev had to examine this manuscript from the political angle, but actually it supplied fascinating material for his intellectual study. The study of *Gītā* was Mahadev's primary interest. Lokmanya's book not only gratified this interest, but by its erudition and zeal encouraged leanings towards Dhyānayoga and Karmayoga.

Jehangir Edulji Sanjana was Mahadev's boss in Oriental Translators' Office. He was charmed with Mahadev's competence and the sweetness of his temperament. Even after retirement, his contact with Mahadev remained as friendly.

Z. A. Barni was another officer in that office. He wrote a book about some reminiscences of his official tenure, viz., *Romance of the Oriental Translators' Office*. He had not come in direct contact with Mahadev, even though he worked in the office during Mr. Barni's tenure. Mahadev's fame had already reached Mr. Barni to the extent that he wrote in his book, about him :

"He lived a very simple life. He was jolly by nature and met everyone with a smile. He aroused affection by his kind and courteous manners. His mere contact was enough to transform the people who were pessimists into optimists. He had neither insulted nor displeased anyone. About him the definition of gentleman given by Cardinal Newman was appropriate.

"I consider it as one of the misfortunes of my life that I did not have a chance to meet him. But I have evinced affection and respect for him from all that I have heard about him from his friends, Brelvi and Vaikunthbhai Mehta and also from Sanjana. His work in the office was very much above the average. He was hardworking as well as very fond of reading."¹

The Oriental Translators' Office gave Mahadev very good experience in translation, as that was his daily work. The great musicians require daily practice till the very end to maintain their excellence. Practice merely during the learning period is never enough. The Oriental Translators' Office provided for the first period of practice for an art which remained and flourished with Mahadev all his life — the art of translation. He achieved brilliant success in the first test of this art, which came about at the very time he was working in that office. The Forbes Gujarati Sabha had announced a prize of Rs. 1,000/-, a very big prize at that time, for translating into Gujarati, Lord Morley's *On Compromise*, a book difficult to comprehend because of its involved language. Several persons, including 'Scholars' translated a few pages of the book and sent

them to the Examining Committee of the Forbes Gujarati Sabha. Mahadev was, probably, the youngest amongst those participants. The Examining Committee selected Mahadev's out of all those received, and decided to award the prize to him. After that when the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad had its session in Surat, people pointed at young Mahadev, with respect or jealousy or curiosity and remarked, 'There goes Mahadev Haribhai Desai, the *'On Compromise man'*'.

Mahadev was ever conscious about his duties towards his family. The main reason for living frugally during his college days was his desire to save his father from a financial burden. He was also keen to share, though in a small way, some of the responsibilities of his loving father. As Mahadev's mother died in 1899, his father married Ichhaben. This marriage gave him four children. Thakore, alias Janardan, Shanta, Nirmala and Parmanand. Nirmala and Parmanand were born some time during the period when Mahadev had joined, or was in the process of joining Gandhiji. But Thakore and Shanta were older and were growing up fast. Mahadev was particularly fond of them. When in 1914, Thakore was invested with the Sacred Thread in Surat, Mahadev made it a point to remain present and to help in every possible way. Even to-day, 50 years after Mahadev's death, Shantaben who was year younger to him, sheds tears at the very mention of *Motabhai* (elder brother).

Haribhai was transferred to Ahmedabad on 1st May 1914 as the Headmaster of Mahalaxmi Ladies' Training College. He lived in the Devji Saraiya Pole in Sankdi Sheri.

A friendship, struck-up during LL.B. studies, played a very important part in shaping Mahadev's life. Shri Narahari Parikh of Kathlal, District Kheda, was introduced to him in Bombay by Shri Manubhai Mehta, a common friend of both. They were first acquainted with each other at the reception for welcoming King George V on his visit to India. Mahadev and Narahari became close friends in a very short time. Narahari's friendship gave Mahadev more opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. Both attended the Sahitya Parishad session at Surat together. Both were introduced to Bengali literature. Both met Gandhiji, for the first time, together.

Mahadev was interested in literature and had read almost all the best literature, published in Gujarati, before he met Narahari. He used to contribute to the college magazine under the *nom de plume* of 'Bhola Shambhu'; his forte was poetry, particularly *bhajans*. Whenever he got the opportunity he met eminent literary scholars. One of them was Narasimharao Bholanath Divetia, whom he met for the first time in March 1915, with a note of introduction from Vaikunthbhai Mehta, which said that Mahadev was a good student of

Gujarati literature and that he was selected by the Forbes Gujarati Sabha to translate Morley's book *On Compromise*.

Shri Narasimharao met Mahadev in spite of the fact that he had lost his young son, Nalin, only a few days before the meeting. He opined that the *bhajans* written by Mahadev were 'good' but not worth 'undue praise'. Mahadev's looks and personality must indeed have left a good impression on Narasimharao, or else he wouldn't have said, 'he looks like a Nagar, though he is an Anavil'.

Later on, when Mahadev translated Tagore's book, *Chitrangada*, he presented it to Narasimharao, in January 1916, the eminent Scholar responded by writing, "Nalin was going to translate this book. I am content that it has ultimately been translated, and that too by a worthy person."

Narahari passed his LL.B with Mahadev and immediately started his legal practice in Ahmedabad. Mahadev also decided to practise in Ahmedabad when Haribhai shifted there. This decision must have resulted from filial love as well as attraction for his friend. He resigned from the Oriental Translators' Office, Bombay, in June 1915 and enrolled himself as a pleader in the District Court, Ahmedabad, in the same month. He lived in Sankdi Sheri with his father. Narahari lived in Kameshwar Pole in Raipur, not very far from Sankdi Sheri, and so both friends could meet each other. In their free time in Court, the two friends would find a corner and translate Bengali literature when other pleaders would gossip or play cards. In this way they translated Tagore's *Chitrangada* and *Bidai-Abhishaap*. Both planned to do many things together in future, of which one was to translate all the works of Tagore for the Gujarati-speaking public. It has been recognised by all critics that the few translations that both of them could bring out, have rendered a great service to Gujarati language in spite of the fact that the changing circumstances prevented them from fulfilling their original desires.

Mahadev had cultivated friendship with promising young men of his age as easily as he had tried to cultivate the proximity of religious men. In this connection we have already mentioned, firstly, Vaikunthbhai Mehta and later on, Naraharibhai. He lived in Parel when he was studying law. He maintained life-long friendship with two of his neighbours of that time. One was the eminent scholar, Ramnarayan Vishwanath Pathak and the second, a well-known educationist, Gijubhai Badheka. All of them together forged strong links of friendship and self-advancement; they were interested in each other's development, exchanged ideas; took pride in each other's advancement. Each of them made his mark in his selected field of activity; it was as if each one was inspired by the will to strive together (सहवीर्य करवावई).

Mahadev did not get much legal work in the court at Ahmedabad. He must have been like the hundreds of pleaders, we see to-day, striding up and down, doing nothing after being enrolled as pleaders. A couple of biographers have said wrongly that Mahadev was interested in practising Law. How could anyone decide whether he was interested or not when actually he did not get any briefs? He enrolled in June 1915. Till the end of 1916 or the beginning of 1917 he was in Ahmedabad. He had only one case to plead for during this entire period. And he had got that case on the recommendation of his friend, Shri Ramnarayan Pathak, who was working in Sadra village. Mahadev received Rs. 125/- as his fee for preparing an application to the Governor of Bombay for some Prince of the Mahikantha Agency. The other one was not even a proper case. It was only the drafting of an application for Mohanlal Pandya to prove his innocence against the charge of sedition. Mohanlal Pandya was known to Mahadev earlier.

Thus his years of legal practice proved unsuccessful, which might be the reason for a reference later on in a letter to Narahari saying, "...When I used to get fed up of the life I considered useless."

Mahadev did not want to fritter away his life like other pleaders without work. And so it seems he spent his time in Ahmedabad in pursuit of knowledge. At that time the lawyers mostly frequented two clubs. Most of them went to the well-known Gujarat Club, which was also frequented by leading citizens of Ahmedabad. The other club was mainly for the lawyers. Narahari had become a Member of the Gujarat Club, while Mahadev became a Member of the Himabhai Institute, the library of this Club was considered the better one.

Mahadev's father, Haribhai, retired from service in November 1916, which resulted in the problem of closing the Ahmedabad house. As the Establishment was run jointly when Haribhai was about to retire, it appears that there was no problem regarding Mahadev's insufficient income. But if Mahadev had to take over the entire burden of the house, he could not afford to wait for the picking up of his legal practice and so he began the search for a job. Once again, his friend, Vaikunthbhai, who was at the time the Manager of the Bombay Central Co-operative Bank, came to his rescue. This Bank loaned money to various Co-operative Societies. There was a need to supervise the work of these Societies. And Mahadev was appointed as an Inspector for the Bank, at Rs. 125/- per month. He went to stay at Bombay. He was posted as an Inspector for the Banks covering the territories of Gujarat and Maharashtra. He found this work very suitable. Initially, he took it

up with full enthusiasm and integrity, he used to travel in both the territories, go to the interior of the village and collect all the information, not only confined to the Banks, but about the overall condition of the place. He took this opportunity to learn the Marathi language. Once, after he joined Gandhiji, Kakasaheb Kalelkar praised his fluent Marathi and asked, "Where did you learn such excellent Marathi?" Kakasaheb knew that a Gujarati, residing in Bombay for years, hardly spoke pure Marathi. Mahadev smiled and replied with a touch of pride, "I learnt it whilst travelling in the villages of Maharashtra with its people, in the bullock-carts, chewing pan with them." Even after joining Gandhiji, when he received letters written in Marathi, he replied in the same language. The Maharashtrian friends, who were particular about the language and its grammar, really praised Mahadev's Marathi. Mahadev was accepted easily, as a friend in any new place because of his love for languages and his capacity to use a language in its pure and refined form, having understood its beauty.

Mahadev tried to understand the actual condition of the villages and the ins and outs of the administration of the institutions through his career as the Bank Inspector. His reports differed from the usual ones submitted by other inspectors. They contained a freshness about them. Vaikunthbhai has expressed his appreciation of Mahadev's work in the following words :

"He was as successful in this as he was in any other work. He established friendly relations with the members and the workers of the Societies he visited, both in Gujarat and Maharashtra. His reports regarding the condition of the Societies and the needs of their members, were not only full of information and valuable suggestions, but were also noteworthy from the point of view of style and language".²

Referring to one particular incident, Vaikuntbhai further says

"An incident in connection with his inspection work deserves to be mentioned. Having visited a Co-operative Society in Kaira District, Mahadev made some specific recommendations which he sent directly to the Bank for implementation. The reason for sending it directly was that the person, who worked as an Honorary Organizer in that division on behalf of the Co-operative Department, had withheld the Society's application for loan without sufficient cause. That person thought that Mahadev had ignored him in sending the case direct to the Bank. He complained to the Registrar of the Co-operative Department that the recommendation ought to have been sent through him as per established practice and to

send his recommendation to the Honorary Organizer for enquiry. When Mahadev was asked for an explanation, he sent such a convincing reply that the Government Registrar after going through it, could no longer press his suggestion. On the contrary, he had to admit that by direct correspondence Mahadev had made it easier for the Society and served it well.

"As the Manager of the Bank at that time, I shall ever remain indebted to Mahadev for having left a stamp of honesty, fearlessness and spirit of service on the newly started institution."³

Describing other notable qualities, Shri Vaikunthbhai continues in the same context :

"Even in his official communications his literary style and his handwriting impressed all in our office. Although he had to suffer a number of hardships in his travels, we could notice in his letters depth of feeling and a natural love for village life. I cannot say whether Mahadev was more of a poet than a philosopher, but I could definitely notice the hidden poet in the descriptions we have in his letters. In college, I knew him as a person of studious habits who was interested in wide reading; but my contact with him now showed me that he possessed the highest literary art. He had as much command of English as he had of Gujarati."⁴

Regarding Mahadev's conscientious nature, Narahari says :

"Mahadev fully exposed to the Bank all the weaknesses of the Co-operative Societies of that time. Many money-lenders got themselves enrolled as Members of Co-operative Societies. They got loans sanctioned by the Societies for such of their creditors as were unable to repay their personal debts, and thus got their own loans repaid. The Secretary of one Society had even misappropriated some of the funds of the Society. Mahadev threatened him and made him replace the amount. During his visits to the villages Mahadev took with him a man servant as well as all that was necessary for cooking his own food. He stayed with the Secretary of the Society only when he could not get accommodation in a public place. Mahadev described to me a woeful incident which happened when he was resting at night in the house of one such Secretary. The man returned home heavily drunk and harassed his wife throughout the night. In spite of the woman's effort to suppress her sobs in view of the fact that a stranger was sleeping in the house, they reached Mahadev's ears. Mahadev felt like getting up and bringing the fellow to his senses, but he thought it

improper to intervene at that late hour of night in a quarrel between husband and wife. Mahadev sent a very strong report of this incident also. The Government Registrar felt that all these reports from Mahadev were excessively harsh. He thought that such strictness, at a stage when Co-operative Societies had been started only with great difficulty, would affect adversely the increase in the number of Societies. Mahadev's mind rose in revolt against this line of thought and, besides, being tired of the hard life of continuous travelling, he sent in his resignation."⁵

Father had retired and Mahadev was feeling apprehensive about the future.

When Mahadev was working for the Bank, he had applied for the post of an Assistant Director, in the Industries Department of the Government of India. On 23rd February 1917, he got a telegram asking him to join immediately, on the same date, at the salary of Rs. 140/- per month. He was earning Rs. 125/- at the Bank. Thus he was getting a little more in this new job. But he gave up the idea about joining it, as he did not deem it proper to leave the job he already had, without an adequate notice.

The Bank Management had asked Mahadev to work in the main office at Bombay when the posts of Inspector were reduced. That work did not suit him. He planned to resign. He asked for a month's leave, prior to his resignation planning to spend one week with Durgaben and the rest of the three weeks with Narahari. By that time Narahari had settled in Gandhiji's Ashram, so Mahadev must have hoped to get a chance to decide, during these three weeks, whether to join Gandhiji or not. But the Bank did not grant the leave and ordered him to accept the post of Assistant Manager at the Bank at the same salary. Friends, specially Vaikunthbhai were pressing him to accept this arrangement but at the same time, he gave a letter of recommendation to Mahadev for some work in *Young India*. Vaikunthbhai respected Mahadev's ethics and efficiency and said later: "I shall never forget my debt to him."

Mahadev had already met Gandhiji, along with Narahari, when he was practising law. That and the subsequent meetings were going to give a new direction to Mahadev's life. Gandhiji advised him to 'have a fling', for a year or so before joining him. Quite some years had passed since his marriage, but he had commenced his householder's life only then and naturally his retired father would have hoped to see his educated son start to earn well. Thus began his search for a job at various places.

Fortunately, Mahadev did not have to struggle long for a job. This was mainly due to the friendship he had cultivated during these

years. More than one friend were willing to do something for him, if given a chance. Secondly, his beautiful handwriting drew attention wherever he applied. His style of writing was very attractive. His personality could charm anyone, though his shyness at the time of personal interview may have gone against him. His speech was clear and sweet; all these attributes made it easier for him to get a job than it is for any educated young man to-day. The conflict was in the selection to be made from the various alternatives.

Vaikunthbhai, always a friend in need, recommended Mahadev to Jamnadas Dwarkadas, a known social worker of Bombay. He was, at that time in charge of *Young India*, an English Publication. Later on it was handed over to Gandhiji. Vaikunthbhai's recommendation was for Mahadev to work for *Young India*. Jamnadas Dwarkadas wanted him as his own Private Secretary and not for *Young India*. Sir Lallubhai Shamaldas, Vaikunthbhai's father, loved Mahadev almost like his own son. He wrote a letter to the Co-operative Bank of the Hyderabad State. He had recommended Mahadev for the post of a Manager and had made a remark to the effect that his salary should be more than the usual one of Rs. 150/- per month. Mahadev was expecting Rs. 300/ if he got the job at Hyderabad.

On the other hand, Dr. Annie Besant had founded the Home Rule League on the 1st September 1916. Jamnadas Dwarkadas and Shankarlal Banker were active Members of the League in Bombay. They were in search of someone to help in the League's work. They were all keen to have Mahadev, each for his own purpose.

By this time, Vakil, one of Mahadev's friends talked finally about him to Jamnadas on 12th August 1917. Jamnadas offered a salary of Rs. 200/ per month and was ready to go upto Rs. 250/ if Mahadev hesitated at the former offer.

Mahadev used to consult his friends about his future. Manu Subedar, later well known as the Editor of *Akhand Anand*, was completely against service with Jamnadas. Just then Dr. Annie Besant had been placed under detention. Subedar believed that Mahadev may be left high and dry, if Dr. Annie Besant's principal disciple, Jamnadas, was also detained. His other objection was that Mahadev would learn nothing new by joining Jamnadas. It would only mean drudgery for Mahadev and his becoming Jamnadas's shadow. Mahadevbhai felt that the second objection was worth considering. When Shri Bhulabhai Desai was consulted about the situation, he laughingly brushed aside the first objection, with a conviction that there was no possibility of Jamnadas being detained.

Shri Subedar was in favour of Mahadev accepting the post of the Home Rule League's Secretary, but not that of Private

Secretary Jamnadas was ready to pay Rs. 200/- for the post of Private Secretary, while Shankarlal offered Rs 150/- for being the League's Secretary.

It seems that Mahadev was inclined towards accepting the post of Private Secretary. He was ready to be detained along with Jamnadas, but he was not clear as to what he would do if only Jamnadas was detained.

The decision on the main issue was not yet clear to him. There was a lot of mental turmoil. It is clear that during this time Mahadev had to keep the financial aspect in view, whilst taking many of the decisions. That was the very reason why he had asked for Rs 300/- from the Bank at Hyderabad. And so he had also accepted the Private Secretary's post with Jamnadas Dwarkadas for about a fortnight. He had written a speech for Jamnadas to be delivered as the President of the Political Conference at Broach. He had also translated into Gujarati, an important political speech of Lord Montagu, the Secretary of State for India for the Home Rule League.

Where service was concerned, Mahadev was inclined to give preference to a better paid job, out of his sense of duty towards his family, as well as proper appreciation of his capabilities, not for mere love of money. If that was the case, he would have joined the service in the Industries Department, Government of India, without bothering to give notice in his previous job.

Narahari was a witness to Mahadev's inner conflict. Mahadev had written to him very specifically, saying, "However harshly you may regard greed for earning money, I am certain that amongst many of my other shortcomings, that is not one." Mahadev always exaggerated to the utmost his smallest shortcoming. When he emphatically denied having a greed for money, he must have said it after self-introspection. It is indeed a fact that during these three years he did worry as to which job would pay him more; but that must have been to compensate his father for two major things. One was his college education and the second, his wife's maintenance at the time of father's retirement. He must have felt that he had not contributed towards the family finances as he should have done.

At the time, the alternatives regarding a service were many. That with either of the two Banks, with the Government of India, with the Home Rule League, or with Jamnadas Dwarkadas — the decision had to be between the beneficial and the pleasurable. For Mahadev, the measuring rod in this was going to be that of benefit.

Not even a glance did Mahadev cast at the pleasurable, when a decision had to be taken at that time. Without fail he always took the path that was blissful and during his whole life never allowed money to be the decisive factor. Nevertheless, he did his duty towards his

family, by writing articles, or occasionally asking for help from a friend. But whenever he thought of money it was out of duty and not out of avance or greed. The sense of duty often induces a straight-laced person to perform disagreeable tasks. It was exactly like that. Whenever Mahadev faced the need of extra money, he informed Gandhiji, took his consent to write an article for a newspaper and earned some money for the family. A couple of such occasions were when once Durgaben was in dire need and when he had to help his father for his sister's marriage and at the time he was in prison. Otherwise he did not see any difference between wood, stone and gold (समलोष्टाश्च काचन).

One thing should be remembered while reviewing the incident of his joining Gandhiji. Mahadev's interest in literature never waned whether in college or during service. He always used to read the latest Gujarati literature. His contact with English literature was limited to extensive reading and writing stray articles and translations from Indian languages. He never thought of writing English poetry after leaving college. He had picked up quite a lot of Marathi from colleagues and villagers. He and Narahari, both, had developed a liking for Bengali, when he was practising law at Ahmedabad. He had improved his elementary knowledge of Bengali, in a short time, without any one's help by reading original Bengali and English translations of books by Rabindranath. The two friends — Mahadev and Narahari — had already translated *Chitrangada*, *Bidai Abhishap* and *Prâchin Sâhitya*. They had started the translation of *Nauka Dubi* and had decided upon the chapters for each of them, when the storm in the form of Gandhi brushed away the dream to translate the entire literature by Rabindranath Tagore in Gujarati, into eternity. He used to borrow and read many books from the library of the Himabhai Institute and encourage the Librarian to get new books by suggesting their names. Thus the library also benefited by his Membership.

At this time of his life, when in Bombay, he took interest in many literary activities and attended literary conferences, as well as those connected with education, religion, study or politics, whenever he got a chance. Mahadev always made it a point to attend an anniversary of a social reformer, a recitation of poetry by a well-known poet, a meet of writers or the arrival of a leader from another province. His cultural horizon was ever-widening because of such reading, discussions and conversations. He met the eminent scholar, Shri Narasimharao B. Divetia, more than three or four times. Thus Mahadev's personality was developing in the literary, cultural, political and spiritual fields for the sacrificial offering in the future.

FOOTNOTES .

1. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadevbhai Desai Smrutichitro* (Guj), pp. 11-12
2. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadevbhai Desai's Early Life*, p. 41
3. Ibid, pp. 41-42
4. Ibid, p. 42
5. Ibid, pp. 43-44

LOVE

Love is the passion that burns and
destroys everything;
The action that creates and
saves everything.

— *Lanza del Vasto*

Justice that love gives is a surrender;
Justice that law gives is punishment.

— *M. K. Gandhi*

My love for Thee that bloomed
A hundred times, in a hundred forms,
Inevitably in every birth, in every age :
Today the love of that ever-lasting day —
— Ends at Thy feet in a never ending stream.

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

CHAPTER IX

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

On the 9 January 1915, Gandhiji arrived at Bombay Port. He left South Africa having decided to settle in India. His fame had preceded him to his motherland. The attention of several thinkers of the world had been attracted towards Satyagraha, a new instrument of social and political change, owing to the outstanding success he had achieved in his non-violent struggle for the Indians living in South Africa. The Indian National Congress had passed a resolution, long before his arrival, supporting his movement. National leaders were keenly interested in this unique experiment. Gopal Krishna Gokhale of The Servants of India Society had visited South Africa and drew the attention of the British rulers towards the problems faced by the Indians living in that Country. Gokhale had recognised the outstanding qualities of Gandhiji, the Leader of that unprecedented struggle who in turn, held Gokhale in very high respect. On his return from South Africa, once while addressing a students' meeting he said about Gandhiji: "This man can make men out of dust." Young Mahadev decided to find out more about this capable man when he read this sentence.

Gandhiji started his Ashram at Kocharab near Ahmedabad, in a rented bungalow of Jivanlal, on 22 May 1915. The Ashram was christened Satyagraha Ashram some time later. Most of the workers from all over India were to come for training in Satyagraha only after the Ashram was built on the Western Bank of Sabarmati River, six kilometres North from Kocharab, near the Dudheshwar temple. Nevertheless, Gandhiji had started to build the spiritual foundation from the time he established the Ashram. He brought out a pamphlet about the aims and objectives, as well as the rules of the Ashram, distributed it in the entire country and sought the comments and suggestions of personalities all over the world. This List of Rules was the basis of character-building for the Ashramites and the individual virtues of truth, non-violence, non-possession, non-stealing

and others were established as a measure of revolutionary social values. Moreover, these rules — which he later called vows — were not to be taken lightly, or to be kept secret. And so Gandhiji wished that they should be widely discussed. He had sent some copies of the pamphlet to the Gujarat Club with the same end in view. At that time, the Gujarat Club was considered to be the cultural centre of Ahmedabad. Narahari picked up a copy of the List of Rules for the Ashram from the Club's table, took it home and read it together with Mahadev. Acceeding to Gandhiji's request, both the lawyer-friends decided to send their reactions to the Rules. A letter was drafted from the notes, they separately prepared, and sent it to Gandhiji, after they had jointly signed it. Narahari says, "We had requested Gandhiji not to take the trouble of sending a written reply to our letter, but to call us personally if necessary. I have not got with me a copy of our letter now, but we had given expression to our bookish opinion that compulsory celibacy might possibly give rise to a number of evils, and that exclusive insistence on handicrafts would hamper the development of the country. As we received no reply to this letter even after five or six days, we concluded that Gandhiji did not attach any importance to it.

"Shortly after this, Gandhiji came to speak at a public meeting at the Premabhai Hall.¹ We followed him when he started to return to his Ashram after the meeting. He was walking very fast, and we had therefore almost to run to catch up with him. We reminded him of our letter. He said, 'Yes, I have received a letter signed by two persons. Are you the two? I have been wanting to call you. I have received a number of letters from other provinces and most of them are good. The one from Sir Gurudas Bannerjee is specially good. I have received very few letters from Gujarat. Of these, yours has appealed to me most. I shall definitely spare time for you. Come and have a talk with me now, if you have time.'

"We were happy to go with him. We had the following conversation on our way :

Gandhiji : What are you doing ?

We : Practising as pleaders.

Gandhiji . Have you got the latest *Indian Year Book* ? I want to look up something in it.

I : I have one of the last year. I shall, however, procure the latest for you.

Gandhiji . Is this how you practise ? When I used to shave, I used to keep the latest shaving equipment.

"He took out our letter after we reached the Ashram and discussed it as he read it. He explained his ideals and viewpoint for nearly an hour and a half. We intervened with our arguments here

and there, but most of the time we did the listening. We were greatly impressed by his continuous exposition for ninety minutes. We walked in silence, although our thoughts were similar. When we reached Ellisbridge, Mahadev spoke out, 'Narahari, I have half a mind to go and sit at the feet of this man.' I replied, 'We shall be most blessed, if we can do so. But I cannot make up my mind just now.' After this we again lapsed into silence and reached our respective abodes. This was our first initiation, the first springing up of a desire to join the Ashram.

"Mahadev had nearly completed his translation of Lord Morley's *On Compromise* in the year 1916. It was necessary to get Lord Morley's permission before publishing it. Mahadev drafted a letter to him, but felt that as the letter was being written to no less a person than Lord Morley, it would be best to show the draft to someone who had recently returned from England and who was conversant with the etiquette and manners of that country. I suggested that we should go to Gandhī Saheb (for we then addressed him in that manner). So we went to the Ashram. Mahadev explained everything about the translation of *On Compromise* to Gandhiji and showed him the draft letter. Gandhiji did not like it and said :

'It is not for nothing that Englishmen call us flatterers who are unfit for Swaraj. Such high praise for Morley as a man of learning and a philosopher, is out of place in this letter. Besides, why should your hand quiver and your pen falter in writing him a letter? You have to write a simple business letter. It should mention briefly how the Forbes Association came to choose you for this work and how carefully you have done the translation, and it need not contain more than ten to fifteen lines. Lord Morley would not care to read a longer letter. I shall dictate the letter if you want, come along, write.'

"We had a long discussion that day on subjects connected with Gujarati language and literature. During the discussion Mahadev, in the heat of argument, used a number of English words and sentences. Having heard him to the end, Gandhiji laughed at him and remarked, 'If you talk such a language to your mother, she will surely give you credit for your vast learning, but the poor lady will not understand a word of what you say.' He then pointed out the extent of the crime committed by educated Gujaratis in neglecting the Gujarati language. This idea that we should learn to respect our own language made us Gandhiji's admirers. I had a feeling of respect for Pandyaji as an elder, and so had Mahadev for Dayalji. I must admit that these two men too were responsible for increasing our attraction to Gandhiji."²

The session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay in the last week of 1915. Mahadev went specially to attend it, from Ahmedabad. Gandhiji also attended this session. Next day Gandhiji was going to visit some places in South Gujarat. Mahadev left that night and reached Amalsad on his twenty-fifth birthday. Gandhiji came to Amalsad, went to Salej to meet his friend from South Africa, Pragjibhai Desai and then went to Surat via Amalsad. Mahadev spent his twenty-fifth birthday accompanying Gandhiji and going from place to place with him.

Narahari too was fascinated by Gandhiji. Pandyaji never failed to go to the Ashram whenever Gandhiji was in Ahmedabad; Narahari very often accompanied him. Gandhiji asked the visitors to the Ashram about their readiness to go to jail through Satyagraha if it was required. Both Pandyaji and Narahari showed their willingness. Narahari wrote long letters to his dear friend Mahadev at Bombay about the various talks carried on in the Ashram, and Mahadev would read these reports with interest in company of his friends.

Just at that time, there was a likelihood of going to jail in Champaran, and so Gandhiji delegated work, through letters to many friends. In a letter to his nephew, Maganlal Gandhi, the Manager of the Ashram, Gandhiji instructed him to consider Narahari as one of the inmates of the Ashram. He wrote ' "I am satisfied with him. Do not hesitate to delegate any work to him which is connected with Ahmedabad." ' Narahari was 'happy beyond measure', when Maganlal Gandhi showed him this letter.

Narahari had planned to go to Ashram in the Summer vacation. During those days, a plan to open a Rashtriya Shala was under consideration. Narahari also had joined Sankalchand Shah, Professor of Gujarat College, and Kakasahob Kalelker, to plan the curriculum and other details. The school was going to start on 7th May 1917, which was Buddha Jayanti. Maganlal assured them of Gandhiji's consent and asked them to go ahead.

Narahari took the decision to join the Ashram without consulting any members of his family or other relatives. He was sure that they would never give their consent. His father had died in his childhood. He could not have gone to the Ashram against his mother's command, but he took this decision immediately after his mother's death. The elders of the family felt hurt at not being consulted. The family members did not like the idea of one of its promising members joining the Ashram, after giving up a booming legal practice. A Sub Judge, one of Narahari's relatives, even called him and chided him. But Ganesh Vasudev Mavlanker, a leading lawyer, went to the Ashram to congratulate Narahari.

A deliriously joyful Mahadev came all the way from Bombay to Ahmedabad to congratulate his friend. By his decisive step Narahari extended remarkable support to Mahadev who was torn by an inner conflict. Mahadev became deeply impressed after visiting the Ashram several times and seeing a genuine behavioural pattern leading towards an idealistic life.

Once when Mahadev came to the Ashram he found Narahari and other teachers of the Rashtriya Shala in some anxiety. Gandhiji had written a pamphlet, explaining the nature of Satyagraha. He asked the teachers of the Rashtriya Shala to translate that pamphlet into English. Just when Narahari, Kakasaheb and others were anxious as to whether they would be able to translate it into English which would get through Gandhiji's stiff test, Mahadev arrived at the Ashram. Narahari was relieved, because he knew Mahadev's art of translation. Mahadev confidently translated the pamphlet and gave it to Gandhiji for scrutiny. While he was reviewing the translation for its language precision, the teachers of the Rashtriya Shala surrounded Gandhiji to learn about the beauties and defects of translation. Narahari describes the incident, thus :

"Mahadev had a long discussion with Gandhiji as the latter went on suggesting changes in the translation. The translation by Mahadev and the discussion over it raised Mahadev in Gandhiji's esteem."³

On one hand there was a constant conflict in Mahadev's mind and on the other Gandhiji felt that he had found in Mahadev the very person he was searching for to help him in his work.

Both of them knew each other. It was 'love at first sight' for each one, but the declaration of it was yet to come. The opportunity for this too came in September. The following letter, written to Narahari by Mahadev, is reproduced in its entirety, because it will help us to understand the innermost feelings, as well as the individual style of Mahadev and Gandhiji. A new section, a new chapter, a new canto was opening up in Mahadev's life. He was getting his life's coveted work :

"My dear Narahari,

"You should treat this letter as strictly confidential. I start it with a request that you should not communicate its contents to anyone. I have already told you that I visited Gandhiji's residence regularly. On the morning of 31st August, certain words of Bapuji created in me the mixed feelings of love, dismay and joy. I shall now try to pen in this letter my short talk with him on that day, although it cannot be easily put into words. Bapuji said, 'It is not without reason that I have asked you to visit my place every day. I want you to come and stay

with me. I have seen your capacity during the last three days. I have found in you just the type of young man for whom I have been searching for the last two years. Will you believe me if I tell you that I have got in you the man I wanted — the man to whom I can entrust all my work some day and be at ease, and on whom I can rely with confidence? You have to come to me. Leave the Home Rule League, Jamnadas and everything else. I have spoken like this only to three persons before this, Mr. Polak, Miss Schlesin and Maganlal. Today I am speaking in the same way to you and I am very happy to do so, for I have found three outstanding qualities in you. They are regularity, fidelity and intelligence. When I first picked up Maganlal, to all appearances, he had nothing special about him. But today you are surprised by his personality. He was not educated. I trained him first for press work. He learnt composing in Gujarati and then in English, Hindi, Tamil and other languages. I was surprised at the speed at which he mastered the art. Since then he has shown his skill in various kinds of work. Let us, however, leave aside Maganlal. The intelligence I have found in you I did not see in him. I am confident that you will be useful to me in various ways because of your good qualities.' I listened to all this with surprise and shyness, without speaking a single word. I interrupted by saying, 'I have never shown you anything I have done', to which he answered as follows: 'How do you know? I can judge people in a very short time. I judged Mr. Polak within five hours. He read my letter published in a newspaper and wrote me a letter. He then came to see me and I at once saw what he was, and since then he became my man. He married and started his practice as a pleader only after he joined me. He told me before marriage that he must earn a little for his children. I told him plainly, "You are mine and your children are mine, not yours. I am getting you married, as I see no objection to your marrying." His marriage was celebrated at my residence. But to revert to the point under discussion, I advise you to give up all thought about the Home Rule League or Jamnadas. Go to Hyderabad. Enjoy yourself for a year or so. Enjoy the pleasures of life to your satisfaction. The moment you start feeling that you are losing yourself resign from there and come to join me.' At this I told him that I was prepared even then to join him. But he replied, 'I know that you are prepared, but I want you to see a little more of life and enjoy yourself. I would need your knowledge of the Co-operative Movement also. We have to free that department from its

defects. Do not be anxious about anything and come back to me after enjoying life for a little longer. I need you for me personally, not for the school, nor for any other work. You may continue where you are for a year or six months. I shall manage without you until then.'

"This talk was like a flow of nectar to me. I drank it for more than half an hour. People then began to flock in and our personal talk stopped. I have continued my visits and tonight I intend to accompany him upto Palghar. Now that he has shown so much affection for me I think it would not be wrong on my part to request him to carry some fruit for your ailing brother, Shankarbhai. This morning I told him that Shankarlal Banker was angry with me. He inquired why. I told him that it was due to the decision I had taken two days back. Bapu then said, 'You should stand his loss of temper. You must.' I told him that Banker was at a loss to know why Bapu should not allow me to work with the Home Rule League, if I gave up Hyderabad and stayed in Bombay, and that I replied to Banker that he could easily get a person to work as an Organiser in my place. Banker did not think he could get one as good as I. I pointed out to Bapu the false position in which I was placed by people who put my price higher than what I considered it to be. Bapuji's comment on this was very short. He said, 'It would be suicidal for us to accept other people's valuation of us. Let them say what they will. You are not concerned with it. It is enough that you have given voluntary service to the League for a couple of hours every evening during your stay in Bombay.'

"This is how matters stand. The letter is getting long, but to whom else I confide these things, if not to you? Send me back this letter after you have read it, for I have given Bapu's talk in his own words. They may be forgotten in course of time. I have not told my father or anyone else the reasons for changing my decision to join the Home Rule League. It would be foolish to write such things in letters. I would like to read this letter to my father and my wife on a suitable occasion.

"I have sent a telegram to Hyderabad saying that I would take up the job if I were given rupees three hundred per month. I have received no reply. If I do not go to Hyderabad, I shall continue in the Bank until Bapu wants me, and shall hire rooms in Bombay within a few days. I must start getting ready for starting whenever Bapu calls me. This means elaborate preparation for carrying on the great penance. May God give me strength. I shall start translation of Gokhaleji's speeches from tomorrow. I shall work at it for a short time every

morning, as I must attend the Home Rule League work in the evenings. I hope your wife is better now.

Yours sincerely,
Mahadev"

Mahadev adds in the Post Script :

"PS : I was sometimes tired of life and regarded it as futile, but now I have developed enough faith in myself to think that life is worth living. Although Bapu told me all these nice things about me and completely embarrassed me, I am unable even now to accept his estimation of me. The only thing certain is that I have never got, nor shall I ever get, such a testimonial in my life. Maybe, I shall be an instrument to achieve something in life for which the world will praise me; but these utterances, emanating from Bapu's heart shall ever remain with me as my life-long treasure."⁴

This sudden shower of love from Gandhiji added to Mahadev's mental turmoil. He was torn between two things. On one hand, the declaration of confidence in him by Gandhiji made him feel blessed and his mind was joyfully restless to accept Gandhiji's command, while on the other he had to think of the family's welfare after his father's retirement. He had not taken his father's permission as yet. Mahadev's sensitive mind could imagine his father's intense pain of separation from the son. Mahadev had not talked with his wife. But he could not contain himself when he saw his very dear friend, Narahari, who was next in his affection, only to his wife, join Gandhiji's Ashram. So he consulted many friends, relating to them the conversation he had with Gandhiji in the beginning of September. The advice given by his boss in the Oriental Translators' Office and an elderly friend Sanjana, appealed to him among various other opinions. He told Mahadev to decide according to his innermost feelings which would lead him to his ideal and not to think of money.

At the end of his letter to Narahari, Mahadev says, "I was sometimes tired of life and regarded it as futile, but now I have developed enough faith in myself to think that life is worth living".⁵

We have considered some of the reasons why Mahadev felt despondent about his life.

Mahadev had obviously failed as a lawyer. Quite probably, he may have mentally compared his one paying case, obtained through the recommendation of a friend like R. V. Pathak, to the string of cases his friend Narahari got during the legal practice.

His enthusiasm to remove corruption from and to improve the efficiency of the Co operative Department also came to a naught. The Bank had asked him to work quietly in the office, as the post of

Inspector was abolished. Some despair may also have been the result of the double standards he perceived amongst those from whom he was seeking work. Our leader of the Home Rule League was more interested in Mahadev becoming his own Private Secretary, and another leader though having faith in Gandhiji's programme, wanted Mahadev for the League's work.

However the main reasons for his despondency were probably his age and his nature. Later on Gandhiji, his Master, compared Mahadev to a rose after which the poetess Sarojini Naidu gave him the title of *Gule Gujarat*. This was due to his feelings which were as tender as the petals of a flower. Mahadev was sensitive, and easily satisfied like his name-sake deity Lord Shiva (Mahadev). At the same time the slightest shock was enough to make him despondent. This was probably the reason for his despair and the loss of interest in life, which had resulted from the petty failures he had encountered. His emotions must have been too much for him because of his youth. Mahadev was not so thick skinned like the hard-headed politicians, that he could just brush aside the failures. His spirit was that of a poet and so, swung with every wave of hope and despair.

It was November 1917. Mahadev's life was in for a stupendous turn. In the exact middle of his life of fifty years, he took a step in a direction from which he never looked back. The decision over which he was ruminating for the previous two years or so, finally took shape in this month. What was that source from which Mahadev got the urge and inspiration to dedicate his life to Gandhiji? This must be examined before we go into the mundane details of his chosen path. "My desire is to keep the ideal of Hanuman before me and inculcating his selflessness, to get through life by surrendering myself to devotion and service", was what he had decided a very short time after joining Gandhiji. What type of urge or inspiration could be at the back of such high yet self-effacing ideal? According to the humble opinion of the author it was the confluence of devotion, erudition and culture, which was at the root of this self-effacing decision.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa had attracted Mahadev even after reading Vivekananda. He used to forget all his education and lose himself in the *bhajan*-singing group of Purushottam Bapji of Godhra. *Bhajans* were his first choice when he started composing poems. Affection was in-built in his nature. And that flower of affection grew into fruit of devotion.

He could not be satisfied through the traditional worship in a temple, or merely by singing *bhajans*, as his devotion was bolstered with brilliant erudition. His philosophy and his extensive reading

were going to lead him to the Divine in man. The experience he had whilst moving in the villages, indicated that the Divine was in the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost. Mahadev had realised that a vital change was needed to propitiate the Divine he found in the huts. He could perceive pure and cultured method of that social change only through the way shown by Gandhiji. Mahadev could see devotion, scholarship and culture in Gandhiji's personality and style of working.

The period when Gandhiji came to India from South Africa, was a period of a meeting of three historical forces. There were two main schools of thought in the political workers; they were commonly known as the Moderates and the Radicals; there was a third line of thought, starting from Ramakrishna Paramahansa to Shri Aurobindo, which was spiritual. It is likely that Mahadev perceived the meeting-point of the gentleness of the Moderates, the dynamism of the Radicals and the sublimated vision of the spiritual men in Gandhiji's programme. He also may have felt the force of the times, leading the country to the conjunction of the three forces. It was an excellent union which saw the confluence of the country's history and Mahadev's inner leanings at a given point. Gandhiji saw three major virtues innate in Mahadev — honesty, loyalty, and capability. Mahadev's refinement was not superficial. Its foundation was built on his honesty. His loyalty culminated in devotion, and had been the result of his capability and scholarship. It was a historical happening and not an accident that his three merits were completely submerged in Gandhiji's Satyagraha, and Gandhiji's personality in which again was the conjunction of modesty, strength and spiritualism. It seemed as if the incomplete work for which Mahadev had come into this world was being completed.

Another aspect also should be considered along with this analysis. During that period of time, there were two inspiring forces for which promising young men were ready to dedicate their lives. They were patriotism and the urge to know the Divine. Not only Mahadev, but many other promising young men saw the combination of the above two forces in Gandhiji. And so Gandhiji's call of Satyagraha attracted many young men who had been moved by both these forces, just as the Gopas and the Gopis of Vrindavan were pulled by Mohan's flute. Vinoba, Kishorelal, Kakasaheb, Swami Anand, Narahari, Pyarelal and many other votaries saw in Gandhi's Satyagraha, the political and spiritual concourse for freedom. Mahadev, thus, was one of the many among the society of worshippers. Only it was his unique devotion that led him to the state of total self-offering.

At the end of the conversation, which took place in the month of September, Gandhiji told Mahadev to have a fling for a year or six months and also said, "I shall somehow manage during that period." But history did not allow the time for that fling. A letter, to Shri Satyendranath Bose, dictated by Gandhiji on 19-9-1917, exactly two weeks after that memorable letter from Mahadev to Narahari is in Mahadev's handwriting. And so Gandhiji had started treating Mahadev, unofficially, if not officially, as his Secretary. There was nothing new in this. Gandhiji never hesitated to use the good offices of anyone who went to meet him. On the second of November, two months later (after the letter), Mahadev met Gandhiji in the Political Conference at Godhra. He had taken Durgaben with him as he was inclined to join Gandhiji. In Godhra, Gandhiji gave them a few days more by asking them both to move about with him for some time and then decide finally. Gandhiji awaited his arrival from Dihen eagerly, where Mahadev had gone from Champaran to seek his father's permission. And when Mahadev returned on the 24th of November, neither Gandhiji needed to ask, 'have you had your fling? Is this decision final?', nor Mahadev felt the need for explanation.

Mahadev's visit to Dihen in 1917 was solely for the purpose of obtaining his father's permission to join Gandhiji. He was not as free with his father as he was with Narahari, to whom he could write about his future dreams easily and enthusiastically. Mahadev knew Haribhai's special fondness for the son who was born to him at the age of thirty-one years. On one hand, it was difficult for him to hear the separation of his son due to that fondness; on the other, the father in him would never wish to hurt the son's feelings. Mahadev must have hesitated initially when talking to his father but the die was cast. Gandhiji may have given him the option to decide finally, later on, but his mind was already made up. So he had to tell his father. Haribhai's reading was extensive; he was aware of Gandhiji's activities and had profound respect for him. But he never imagined that his son will go away to stay with Gandhiji. His second son Thakor, alias Janardan, born to Ichhaben, had died in the plague within three days, in that very year, the shock of which was still fresh and now Mahadev was almost relinquishing this world. These must have been Haribhai's feelings. The income for maintaining the household was also not very much after retirement. But he had never thought about it, and neither had he allowed his mind to think that his eldest son would earn a lot and build a mansion. Mahadev was the one who thought more about his father's financial condition. The father's main worry was Mahadev's sensitive nature. He knew that those living with Gandhiji had to live a hard life and so he worried

as to how Mahadev would stand it ! Mahadev decided to put aside his yearning to go to Gandhiji when he saw that his father was displeased. He decided that he would stay on anyhow, but would not join Gandhiji without his father's permission. Gandhiji had sent Narahari to the station to receive Durga and Mahadev. When he returned alone, he saw a telegram lying near Gandhiji with the news that Mahadev was unable to come. Gandhiji did not feel less disappointed than Narahari but he kept quiet. He kept quiet, realising that one has to face many such swings of hope and despair in social work. But Mahadev had no peace ! His face was so open that his pain was clearly seen. How could a loving father tolerate such pain felt by his son ? Next day he gave permission to him to go to Gandhiji by saying, 'May you be victorious !' Mahadev sent another telegram to Gandhiji and presented himself before Gandhiji in Champaran with Durga. The twenty-five years' sacrifice began after exactly twenty-five years of all-round prayerful preparations.

FOOTNOTES :

1. This lecture was delivered on 4-9-1915. It can be conjectured that Mohan and Mahadev met on this day.
2. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, pp. 45-48
3. Ibid. pp. 51-52
4. Ibid. pp. 52 to 56
5. Ibid. p. 56

CHAPTER X

THE PILGRIMAGE BEGINS

Exactly fifteen years later, in the Hindalga Jail of Belgaon, Mahadev would conclude his commentary "My Submission" on Gandhiji's *Anasaktiyoga* (translation of *Gītā* in Gujarati) thus :

"... Each one of us has to sacrifice ourselves — our petty and narrow circumscribing selves — in order to be one with the Self. We have to burn ourselves out with a heart and a will and a cheer each in his or her own sphere : our wicks may be ever so flimsy, our oil ever so poor, our flame ever so feeble, just enough to light our narrow paths, but ultimately our dim lights will blend right enough with the Universal Flame. All sacrifice, no matter how small or great, provided it is pure, reaches Him, ranks the same with Him, there is no last nor first."¹

Mahadev had initiated his own sacrifice fifteen years ago.

Mahadev had imbibed the teaching of the 18th Discourse of the *Gītā*.

"Action for sacrifice, charity and austerity may not be abandoned; it must needs be performed. Sacrifice, charity and austerity are the purifiers of the wise."²

Mahadev was blessed with plentiful spiritual excellence. The process of distribution of this excellence was going to be so full of penance that in the end his flame would be one with the Universal Flame. For twenty-five years from the day he left Bombay on 1-11-1917 — exactly till his last offering — the continuous process of offerings in the sacrifice had begun.

The story of the offering of the self is thrilling. It is the story of a soul mingling with the Eternal Flame after its constant daily purification. It is the story of an endeavour of widening one's horizons — from the self to the country and from the country to the world. And yet the beauty of it is that it is not the story of a mendicant, a recluse, or a saintly soul, but it is the story of a man of taste and feelings, who can enjoy life and who never laid claim to

asceticism. He spent his life worrying as to his fitness for the work allotted to him by God.

Mahadev was going to Godhra from Bombay by the Frontier Mail, the fastest train available in those days. He had to attend the Gujarat Political Conference, beginning on the third. He was going two days earlier as he had to be with Gandhiji early next morning. Mahadev must have been impatient to be with Mohan.

He was accompanied by his wife, Durga. The couple, twenty-five year old Mahadev and twenty-four year old Durga, was handsome enough to attract attention. Mahadev's lovely face would have charmed anyone. His eyes were bewitching. Durga was joyful within, but outwardly reserved. The women of the neighbourhood in Dihen, were jealous of her and spitefully called her a 'slim doll', or 'delicate darling'. Durga was unaware of this jealousy because of her simplicity which made her a favourite of those who knew her.

They were accompanied by Gaganvihari Mehta, who later became known as an author of mirthful writings full of humour, renowned economist and our Ambassador to the U.S.A.; but at that time he was only a youngster, eager to see how Gandhiji was going to charm the political conference, he was the youngest son of Lallukaka and younger brother of Mahadev's close friend, Vaikunthbhai. He was slightly shorter than Mahadev and no less good-looking. Lallukaka had made a number of recommendations about Mahadev, one of which was to Gandhiji. Shri Lallubhai Shamaldas had affectionately recommended his son's friend Mahadev with the hope that Gandhiji would get in him a Secretary of his choice. But Gandhiji had already gauged him without anybody's recommendation. And Mahadev, for his part, was already charmed by 'Gandhi Saheb'.

Durga, very much in love with Mahadev, was not much educated, though not totally inexperienced. She had cultivated a devotional frame of mind, learnt from her father and father-in-law. But she never made a show of that devotion. She could grasp a person's character merely by seeing him. She not only understood Mahadev, but was completely captivated by him. Mahadev was a bit anxious about the future and whether he would suit Gandhi or not. 'Would he be able to make himself worthy of Gandhi?' This thought troubled him. Durga had nothing to worry her. She had known her husband and was to know Gandhi later. As she was accompanying her loving husband, the question as to her destination never bothered her. Mahadev may have been thinking as to how Gandhiji would talk to him and as to what questions he would ask. Durga could never think that Gandhiji would ask her anything. Her answer to every question was her presence with her husband. Yes, she was not

used to moving out, nor had she seen Political Conference, though Godhra was not entirely unknown to her on account of Purushottam Bapji. Mahadev was telling her about the people attending the conference. He always saw the good points of others, rarely noticing the faults. He was never tired of eulogising Tilak Maharaj, Gandhiji or Mohammed Ali Jinnah, to Durga, as God had endowed Mahadev with descriptive power which he had developed after years of effort. Gandhiji requested Tilak to speak in Marathi instead of in English and Khaparde translated it into Gujarati, which Mahadev heard with curiosity, as an excellent translator himself, as a literary critic as well as one who knew both Marathi and Gujarati. But even at that time his view must have been that of one admiring the merits and not one of a critic.

Narahari Parikh has described this conference in a very lively manner in the First Part of Sardar Vallabhbhai's biography.

"After Gandhiji became the President of the Sabha, it was decided to hold the Political Conference in Gujarat every year. The first such conference met at Godhra, the headquarters of the Panch Mahals District, the most backward of all areas in Gujarat. The reason for this choice was one Vamanrao Mukadam's enthusiasm. He was from the Panch Mahals, follower of Lokmanya Tilak and had taken part in political movements since the Partition of Bengal in 1905. He was playing a leading role in the Home Rule League Movement, aimed at abolishing forced labour."

Narahari continues :

"Gandhiji presided over the Conference and he made it in many ways unique. Although it was the Political conference of Gujarat, leaders of other provinces were also invited and many of them attended it. Vitthalbhai Patel came from Bombay. His active participation was to be expected but Jinnah's attendance was significant. As a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity he received a rousing welcome. Tilak Maharaj and his great friend Khaparde, added to the importance of the occasion by their presence. An innovation effected by Gandhiji was that all speeches were in Gujarati. Sarojini Naidu, on hearing that Jinnah had spoken at this conference in Gujarati, wrote that this was indeed a miraculous triumph for Gandhiji. Tilak spoke in Marathi.

"Another innovation at this Conference was the omission to pass a resolution at the outset affirming loyalty to the British Empire and to the Crown. Gandhiji felt that loyalty must be assumed, and asked of his critics whether the British commenced conferences in their own country with any such

'Loyalty' resolution. This was a new approach and while it pleased many who had no great love for the British Empire, it taught a sense of proportion in the matter to those who were loyal.

"But the most important of all changes was the decision by the conference at Gandhiji's instance to appoint an Executive Committee which would remain in existence throughout the year until the next session was held. Hitherto, conferences and congresses were like Annual Festivals. There was usually great enthusiasm among the people at the time the conference was held, and thereafter nothing or next to nothing was done during the rest of the year. Hereafter, with the adoption of the new system, the President of the Conference was to nominate his Executive Committee and with its help endeavour to implement the decisions taken at the conference."³

Mahadev may have had his interest in Political Conference, but at that particular time there was only one interest - to be with Mohan.

Mohan had himself called Mahadev. 'I do not call anybody like this. You are the only one I am asking for', was what he had said. So when Mahadev went to him with his wife, he must have been happy beyond measure; but Gandhi, who was 23 years senior to Mahadev, had wisdom mixed with his joy. He had the combination of zeal with fortitude. And so he asked Mahadev, "When do you intend to join me?" "From the moment you ask Sir", came the answer. "We are ready to join from to-day."

"Both?" Gandhi asked.

"Yes, indeed!"

"Can you join me in my travel, after the Conference?"

"Certainly."

"All right!" Gandhi said. "You do like this. Stay with me for some days. If you find it suitable, you can decide to stay on. Or else...." "Just as you say."

From the time of the Political Conference at Godhra, Gandhi obtained the service of Mahadev who never disobeyed him during the rest of his life.

After some time, Mahadev noted in his diary, a song of Poet Rabindranath Tagore after his own visit to Shantiniketan.

Our pilgrimage has commenced,
O Captain!
Come wind, Come storm,
Return, we will not.

FOOTNOTES ·

1. M. D., *The Gita According to Gandhi*, N.P.H. 1991, p. 121
2. Ibid. Dis. XVIII. V. 3, p. 364
3. Narahri Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*. Vol. 1, N.P.H., pp. 42 to 44

CHAPTER XI

FIRST EXPERIENCE OF CONSTRUCTIVE WORK — CHAMPARAN

Mahadev went to Champaran in North Bihar from Godhra on 6-11-1917. The first note in Mahadevbhai's diary, now made famous, is written on 13-11-1917, exactly a week later. No one seems to have asked him to take notes. It was instinctive inspiration. And what an inspiration ! Mahadev died on 15th August 1942. He had written his diary upto the day before his death.

But the diary is that of Gandhiji, and not that of Mahadev. It has not been written whenever Mahadev had been separated from Gandhiji. This was a clear example of Mahadev's capacity of becoming a non-entity.

Mahadev begins every diary with one or more quotations on the first page. The quotations are indicative of his thought process of those days. A stanza from Tukaram's verse and a sentence from Dean Church have been written on the first page of the first diary. Both are significant —

"Let that place be burnt, let that wisdom be burnt.
Let my devotion ever be fixed at the feet of the Lord !
May that behaviour be abandoned, along with the thought,
Let my mind be immovable from the feet of the Lord."

— *Sant Tukaram*

"Like most of human things, discipleship has its good and its evil, its strong and its poor and dangerous side; but it really has a good and strong side; its manly and reasonable humility, the enthusiasm of having and recognising a great master and doing what he wanted done."

— *Dean Church*

Both these examples are typical of Mahadev's attitude, not only of that period but of the rest of his whole life

He did not come empty handed to Gandhiji. He had the unique combination of virtues such as excellent knowledge of languages,

extensive reading, beautiful handwriting, the skill to write beautifully at an unusual speed, study of the best points of ancient and modern cultures, capacity for profound thoughts, and he topped it all with humility, refinement and a sense of dedication. And yet he considered devotion to be superior to all these virtues, and so he said, "I did not have anything else more worthy than my devotion to Gandhiji."

'Only because of that devotion' had he been able to concentrate his feelings at the feet of Gandhiji regardless of his own knowledge, wisdom, behaviour or thought. He recognised his great master with dignity in spite of having experienced the weak, unsavoury and horrifying aspect of the surrender as a disciple. He was able to live and die according to his wishes.

The story began as Gandhiji's activities became Mahadev's activities. The tasks of presenting Gandhiji's work to the country as well as to the world, thinking identically with Gandhiji, and taking up Gandhiji's work on his behalf even when away from him, were to come later. Fulfilling the tasks indicated by Gandhiji was the beginning of the process.

The work done at Champaran in the first phase lasted only a week. From the beginning to the very end of this story we will have to understand Gandhiji's work from time to time, to appreciate the value of Mahadev's contribution. We would have to know about the atmosphere prevalent in various places during the twenty five years of his life with Gandhiji, because he was the conscience and the prudence of the country during this period. The story of Mahadev's spiritual pilgrimage cannot be revealed without doing this. Where Mahadev's life is like river Saraswati losing its identity at Teertharaj Prayag in Gandhiji's Gangā, Gandhiji's own life is like Gangā at Gangā Sāgar where it meets the ocean of the people of India.

Gandhiji had returned from South Africa with Satyāgraha as a successful instrument. He had begun to understand the innermost feelings of India and the Indian people after a year's travelling in the country by third class on Indian Railways, on Gokhale's advice. He had visited almost all the provinces, served as a volunteer in the Kumbha Melā, held discussions with a number of people of different types and had maintained the strict discipline of observing silence where public speaking was involved. This also was on Gokhale's advice. After the year was over he attended the Congress Session, Political Conferences of various provinces, associations of various communities and different groups. He differed from others in his dress. He did not put on the usual western-style clothes - a coat and trousers - but had a Kathiawadi coat and a turban and insisted on speaking (in public) in Gujarati or broken Hindi. People in the

country became curious when they saw his simple style of life and food. They applauded him as something fresh, something unknown like the coach who pats his new pony Mahadev had already passed the stage of curiosity about Gandhiji a year and a half ago, his desire to know him better had been aroused, he had been impressed by whatever he had seen and yet his marvel had not fully abated. His faith had been awakened, his mind was ready to be drenched with love and plunge into devotion, but the total oneness of the external and internal feelings had yet to be achieved. The people of the country had eulogised Gandhiji, they had yet to give him a place in their hearts.

Our country ? In those days, no one thought of the country as a whole. So there was no question of the country having one voice ! According to what Gandhiji said and Mahadev recorded some time later, "We stand on the threshold of a twilight — whether morning or evening we do not know. One is followed by the night, the other heralds the dawn."¹

The wounds caused by dissention between the Moderates gave vent to their dissatisfaction for the prevailing conditions in India through suggestions in the legislatures, through Government or Semi-Government Institutions, which they entered. The Extremists strongly criticized the Government for the then prevailing condition, through public meetings and fiery speeches. But neither party had any concrete programme.

Gandhiji had returned from South Africa after having used a concrete programme. But he had yet to try that programme in India. He was not inclined to use Satyagraha as a programme either. He had found it naturally while facing the unjust conditions of South Africa. In India he was only trying to understand the situation. He realized that India had faintly perceived its goal, but it had yet to find the way to achieve that goal.

Gandhiji himself was not very clear as to the next step. Actually he had thought about his own country and dedicated his life to achieving his ideals portrayed in *Hind Swaraj*, written as early as in 1909. But instead of indulging in formulating long drawn plans, he was in the habit of putting his ideas into practice. He had established the Phoenix Ashram. Personally he considered *moksha* (salvation) as the ultimate aim of his life. To achieve that his constant effort was to reduce himself to a 'big zero'. He prayed that only the tune of the Lord should emerge from his flute — made hollow by carving out his ego from it — He did not look for programmes, they themselves came to him. He came across three such programmes during the year Mahadev joined him. They related to the Indigo farmers of Champaran in Bihar, the textile labourers of

Ahmedabad, and the farmers of Kheda who did not pay land revenue because of the poor crop that year. Within four years of Mahadev's joining Gandhiji, he had moved from the individual stand of 'Salvation is my ultimate goal' to calling the British Government 'Satanic' — a Government towards which he was fairly loyal until then.

According to Gandhiji, there was no difference between the way to liberation and that of fighting the evil that was the British Government. He was fortunate enough to get disciples who also did not make any distinction between the two paths — the one of salvation and the other of the country's freedom. Mahadev was one such disciple.

Mahadev learned about the problems of the farmers of Champaran and the History of the agitation started by Gandhiji on the way to Motihari from Godhra via Patna. Gandhiji had signed the report of the investigation of the condition by a Governmental Committee, as the representative of the farmers who were the victims of the *tinkatiya* arrangement. This was a month before Mahadev and Durga reached Champaran. More than twenty-five thousand statements had been collected by Gandhiji and his co-workers as proofs of victimisation of the workers by the indigo-planters. But the planters were pleasantly surprised when Gandhiji did not insist on their substantiating their offences and requesting that punishment should be meted out. But Gandhiji insisted that the practice of reserving three-twentieth part of the farmers for indigo-planting should be abolished. The indigo-planters and the Government representative accepted this condition and in this way an unjust practice of the past hundred years was abolished. Gandhiji was successful, beyond his expectation, in this non-violent movement in India. Actually he did not have to start any direct programme of non-violent resistance in Champaran. The Government had to appoint a Committee of Inquiry on mere recording the cases of victimisation of thousands of farmers and it was at his insistence that the Committee had given a unanimous decision. Due to this movement, the farmers of Champaran had learnt a lesson in fearlessness, the workers of Bihar had learnt self-help and living a simple life without engaging servants, they had also learnt to live amongst the poor as one of them and not to make any exaggerations in the reports because of Gandhiji's training. The Indian people had got a taste of success in Satyagraha.

Constructive work begins simultaneously with Satyagraha. This was the method of the unique way, indicated by Gandhiji. It was during this inquiry that Gandhiji himself had seen for the first time the terrible poverty, ignorance, filth and superstition, prevalent in Indian villages. It was decided to start some educational, health and

sanitation programmes in some villages with a view to rendering some service to these people. Mahadev and Durga were going to be initiated into this work.

Gandhiji had called many workers from places other than Bihar for school, health, cleanliness and such other programmes. The workers from Bihar, who had helped Gandhiji in his work about Champaran, were mostly lawyers. Well known lawyers such as Brij Kishor Prasad, Majhrool Huq, Rajendra Prasad, Dharni Dhar Babu had left their own work to come and help Gandhiji. It was highly unlikely that these people would join the type of constructive work as Gandhiji visualised it. Within a few months they had realised what it meant to work for Gandhiji. Each of them had brought with them a servant. Gandhiji talked with them and made them work for themselves, wash their own clothes, cook together, clean vessels, and write the reports of the farmers whilst sitting on a mat. The term 'constructive work' had not been in use then. These people would support constructive work as a programme but would not take it up themselves. That work could be taken up by only the young workers from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka. That group also included some women, which was an advantage. In those days it would have been impossible even to imagine any woman related to the Bihar workers joining any social activity. It was years later that Prabhavati, Brij Kishor Babu's daughter and Jay Prakash Narayan's wife became an active worker. Narahari had reached Champaran before Mahadev. Maniben had accompanied him. Durgaben went with Mahadev. Avantikaben and Anandiben from Maharashtra were also there. Kishorelal Mashruwala also met Gandhiji at Champaran. But Gandhiji sent him off to Sabarmati to work for the Rashtriya Shala, as his health was somewhat delicate. Gandhiji wanted Mahadev as his own Private Secretary from the very beginning. Mahadev worked and stayed with Durgaben in Champaran for some time and then went with Gandhiji on his tour believing it to be of a short duration. Durgaben stayed back in Champaran. Sankalchand Shah, the Principal, Rashtriya Shala, Sabarmati, wrote a letter to Gandhiji asking about the reason for detaining Narahari at Champaran. Narahari had initially joined the Rashtriya Shala at Sabarmati. Gandhiji considered the work at Rashtriya Shala also very important, and so he sent Narahari back to Sabarmati. Mahadev and Narahari lived the austere life along with Gandhiji by giving warmth to each other. But they selected different types of work, although both were with Gandhiji, the result was that Narahari was steady in one place while Mahadev had to be always on the move with Gandhiji. As a result Narahari and Maniben could stay together for many years of their lives, while Durgaben had to lead a lonely life.

Maniben's daughter, Vanmala Desai, has given a description of that work at Champaran, at the end of her biography of Naraharibhai under the heading, *Maniben nu Kathanak*. This short description is an invaluable work in Gujarati literature as the subject is the life with Gandhiji and moreover it has been written guilelessly. For Mahadev, the constructive work at Champaran, proved to be quite a minor task, but for Durgaben it was the beginning of her penance. During this period Maniben and Durgaben were together in the beginning. Sometime later Narahari went to Sabarmati with Maniben. Mahadev handed over the work in the villages to Durgaben and joined Gandhiji in his travels. Thus Durgaben had to do all the work by herself. A vivid picture of those times is presented in *Maniben nu Kathanak*, out of which some incidents are reproduced here.

"We were staying in a farm at Motihari. Ba, Bapu, Mahadevbhai, Durgaben, Rajendrababu, Dharnidhar Babu, Brijkishorbabu, Narahari and myself, all of us used to dine together and the food was prepared in one kitchen. Durgaben and I used to cook and Rajendrababu's servant used to do all the rest of the work. Swami Satyadev also used to dine with us. He wanted his *chapaties* hot when he had his dinner and he never came on time. Once he did not come till the time for the evening walk and Durgaben and I waited with the dough prepared. Bapu came to know of it as we did not go for a walk. He did not like it. He told Swamiji that either he should come on time or else he should make some other arrangement. Swamiji made other arrangement.

"Once whilst going for a walk Ba dropped the small screw of her bangle and lost it. We helped her to search for it but could not find it. Bapu said, 'What is the delay? Why don't you come?' I said, 'We cannot find the screw of Ba's bangle.' Bapu said, 'Tell Ba, I am still alive; come along without the bangle', but Ba would not come. At last a thin neem stick was used instead of the screw and we went for a walk. We used to go for a walk with Bapu after the evening meals. If Durgaben and I were delayed in the kitchen, he would come there and wait for us. We would feel embarrassed, but he would not leave us and go. We both would be left behind and Bapu used to walk at a fast pace. Bapu would send back either Mahadev or Narahari to give us company. The one who would have to come would get annoyed with us, he would make us run and join Bapu. Mahadev would say, 'You two do not walk fast, just like two buffaloes.' The one who would have to remain behind would be deprived of Bapu's conversation, so they did not like

it. But they had to obey Bapu and fall back to remain with us. Bapu did not want to leave us alone as some of the road where we walked was lonely and dark like a forest.

"There used to be jokes during meals. Once during meals, Mahadev and Narahari who relished *dal* began taking it with the hand which made a peculiar sound. Bapu saw and heard the sound. He said, 'You both will be driven off a dining table in England, if you made such noise whilst eating.' Both said, 'What do the Britishers know about the heavenly taste of *dal* when eaten with hand and not with a spoon?'

"In those days Bapu used to eat well. Food for him was prepared from two *katories* of flour for *roti*, one *katori dal*-seeds and one *katori* uncooked rice. We used to make forty *rotis* from the flour. If sometimes there were more, Bapu would ask us as to how much we had taken. We would say that Ba had given us the flour; and he said, 'Ba would always take out more because she wants me to eat more.'

"We got very nice curds in Bihar. It would be nice and solid in a container made out of dry leaves. Brinjals also were nice, big and black. Bapu said, 'Don't you feel like preparing *bharat* when you get such brinjals and curds? *Bharat* is an item of vegetable made by roasting the brinjal on open fire, and mixing it with curds, little salt and coriander powder after removing its burnt skin. He would want *chutney* to be prepared daily, would get bananas which were very cheap. Bapu was very fond of food.

"Bapu used to call the farmers when we were staying at the Motihari Farm. The case for the tax on the Indigo farming was in progress at that time. He used to collect all information before the case was conducted in the court. Mahadev and Narahari would meet everyone of the farmers who came, write down the detailed information and give it to Bapu. Daily there would be about four to five hundred farmers. They would come and wait outside the farm in the morning for about four to five hours and whilst waiting they will go on singing: 'May God grant long life to Gandhiji's son. Please see my case O God.'

"Bapu called a big meeting and told the people that he was leaving a couple to work amongst them; that they would benefit to the extent of their capacity to learn from them. He said to me, 'We have a vow both of non-possession and non-stealing but still I tell you to go to the homes of these people, meet the women and steal their hearts and love. Achieve as much as you can.' Bapu left us and went away. But I did not know a word of Hindi. Their language also was colloquial

which I could not follow. Their words were peculiar. Every night I would learn ten words of Hindi from Naraharibhai. But I could not run a school on that knowledge. I took the girls who came, to the well, gave them a bath, washed their hair and clothes and sent them home in the evenings.

"The mothers were surprised and curious to know what type of a teacher I was to make the girls so clean? The girls there washed their hair once a fortnight according to their custom, apply gum with water and tie up the hair which would be opened only after a fortnight! They did not comb their hair daily. Their clothes were also very dirty. No one would wash clothes at home. The *dhobi* would take them. The washing charges were very low. They would change the clothes once a week when the *dhobi* brought them back. This custom probably originated because of laziness as well as because of their having very few clothes. Their food was *sathvo*, a type of mixed flour of gram, jowar and wheat ground after roasting the grains. This flour was available in the market. They would put a little water in this flour either in a vessel, or if there is no vessel, then in a cloth, make balls and eat those balls with salt and raw vegetables such as radish, cucumber and tomatoes. This was their food.

"They were a very poor people. They would get only four annas after a full day's labour. They lived in a straw hut. The top of the wells also used to be at ground level. There was no basin around it, or even a parapet; all the dirty water after washing and bathing would go back into the well. All this was terribly dirty. It was impossible to stand near the well as there was stinking, black mud around it. We decided to clean this well. We would go into a village in the evening, take a spade and a hoe, remove the stinking black mud around the well and sprinkle fresh earth there. And then spray it with detergents. We would clean a well a day with great difficulty. The villagers would ask us not to do it and say that they would do it themselves. We would ask them, 'When?', they would answer, '*bihan*' which means tomorrow!

"At night we would eat *papaya*, roasted sweet potatoes and drink hot milk. Forty girls attended our schools. Every Sunday I went to meet their parents. They used to enjoy talking to me. They did not like the fact that I cooked the food myself. They offered me to supply a cook. I said, 'We eat food cooked only by ourselves.' The custom of untouchability was very strong. They would not even touch each other.

"The women were ready and waiting for me when I went to a house. We could meet the women only when we crossed two or three rooms. They said, 'You are Gandhiji's daughter'. Saying this they brought a big tray with materials for worship and applied milk and *kumkum* on my big toe. I did not understand what it meant, but I drew back my feet. They said, 'We want to worship you'. I replied, 'Do not perform any worship. You just talk with me'. They used to cover their faces according to their custom. They would cover their face before everyone. I would uncover their faces and explain that I was just one of them. And if you persist in this behaviour, I wouldn't come to you. Then they would uncover their faces and talk with me. But I could not follow their language and I could not speak Hindi, so our talk was mainly through sign language. Nevertheless, both the parties would be happy at the time of parting.

"It was very cold at Motihari when we went there. We did not have any bedding. There was one pillow and a cotton carpet which I gave to Naraharibhai. We bought a rug for a rupee from Bihar. We made a pillow of our clothes. It was so cold that we could not feel warm even though Durgaben and I slept side by side. Mahadevbhai and Naraharibhai slept in the same manner on a wooden bed. Bapu also had only one rug. He would spread half of it and cover himself with the other half. Bapu would tell Mahadevbhai and Naraharibhai to spread the newspapers over him and Ba. Ba also managed in a similar fashion. We all had a good taste of the cold."

Durgaben who had studied upto Gujarati Standard Sixth, quickly took up a teacher's work. Her interest in reading had tremendously developed. Mahadev often came to Champaran from wherever he was with Bapu. Very often Gandhiji also had to come to Champaran and at that time Mahadev naturally would accompany Gandhiji. It was a day of rejoicing for Durgaben. Mahadev would give all the attention he could on such days as he always felt guilty at having kept Durgaben separated from himself. Gandhiji was also fully conscious about this. And so he would give both of them an opportunity to be together without interference. He would leave them alone and say, "Tomorrow both of you enjoy as you want to, dine at night at any time you want, prepare a vegetable with tomatoes and eat it with relish."²

We might feel amused at the liberty given by Gandhiji, but Mahadev and Durga were as much devoted to him as they were young. At such times they used to be in seventh heaven at Gandhiji's immense affection.

But the joy of union was followed by the pangs of separation. Durgaben used to feel unhappy whilst parting and Mahadev's heart was softer than wax. He could see tears in his wife's eyes. Durgaben would dry her tears and say, "This must be my fate." With a heavy heart Mahadev would say, "It is my fate to pain you everytime and watch you crying."

Gandhiji started the first school in Bardarwahas on 20th November 1917, a week after Mahadev reached Champaran, and started a second school in Madhuvan on 17th January 1918.

The main curriculum of these schools was children's personal cleanliness, bathing them, washing their clothes, washing their hair, cutting their nails, cleaning the villages, removing the muck around the wells, talk about their social and economic condition with the village women, and reading to them from the Ramayana and other religious literature. There were three medicines, castor oil, soda bicarb and quinine in 'dispensaries' run by these schools or by the women village workers. Every disease was treated only with these three medicines! But the most important medicine that partly cured the patients was the affectionate care that the women worker showered on them.

In North Bihar and U.P., a teacher is called *Pandit*. To the newly educated young and old of Betia, Motihari, the school catered for both the young and old, there was no difference in *Pandit* and *Panditani*. So they addressed Durgaben as *Pandit*. Mahadev liked this name. It was necessary for him to share every little thing of his personal life with his bosom friend, Narahari. When they were translating works of Rabindranath Tagore in the Ahmedabad District Court, both Durgaben and Maniben were called *Ginni* (*Grihini* — housewife). In Champaran it became 'Elder *Pandit*' and 'Younger *Pandit*'! Gradually the name 'Younger *Pandit*' was forgotten and the prefix elder as well as younger was dropped. And so an excellent Scholar like Mahadev addressed Durgaben who had studied upto Gujarati Sixth Standard as *Pandit* till he died.

Of the various activities undertaken by Gandhiji after his return from South Africa, the movement at Champaran was of great importance. He entered the hearts of his countrymen through that movement. The Champaran Satyagraha was like a small experiment for what was to follow in the future.

It was natural that Gandhiji wanted to inform his friend in South Africa about this experiment. He wrote a detailed letter to Mr. West about Champaran. A part of it with the reference to Durga-Mahadev and Mani Narahari is reproduced below.

"I think everybody wonders at my output of work. And nothing is of my seeking. I have taken up activities, as they

have come to me. In Bihar, besides watching legislative activity, I am opening and managing schools. The teachers are, as a rule, married people, and both husband and wife work. We teach the village children, give the men lessons in hygiene and sanitation, see the village women and persuade them to break through the *purdah* and send their girls to our schools. And we give medical relief free of charge. Diseases are known and so are the remedies. We, therefore, do not hesitate to entrust the work to untrained men and women, provided they are reliable. For instance, Mrs. Gandhi is working at one such school, and she freely distributes medicine. We have, perhaps, by this time, cured 3000 malaria patients. We clean village wells and village roads and thus enlist villagers' active co operation. Three such schools have been opened and they train over 250 boys and girls under 12 years of age. The teachers are volunteers. . . . In all this, it is my good fortune to be well assisted."³

There are various opinions as to who first began to address Gandhiji as a Mahatma. It seems that at a reception in his honour in Gondal he was first addressed as a Mahatma and later on Rabindranath Tagore used the same epithet in Shantiniketan, but it was in Champaran that he became a Mahatma of the people.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel — A Life*, p. 73
2. Vanmala Desai, *Naraharibhai* (Guj.), pp. 216 to 223 (Selected)
3. M. D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, pp. 32-33

CHAPTER XII

LIFE AT THE ASHRAM

Gandhiji had written about the Sabarmati Ashram to Mr. West in the very letter in which he described the constructive work at Champaran.

"The Ashram is beautifully situated on the Banks of the Sabarmati River. We bathe daily in it. All the children can swim now. The school is under an able Principal, who was a distinguished Professor of the Gujarat College. The Ashram, of course, is under Maganlal's management. I do not know what is in store for the Ashram or the school. They are at the present moment popular institutions."

This description is dated February 1918. Mahadev and Narahari had met Gandhiji for the first time in the Ashram when it was in a rented house at Kochrab on the opposite Bank of the river at Ahmedabad. But the above description of the Ashram is that of the one he established on a land about six kilometres in the north on the Western Bank of the river. In a very short time this Ashram was going to be the centre of attention for the whole country. And the world famous Dandi March was to commence from there after twelve years.

Adjoining the Ashram on the extreme south was the Dudheshwar Temple, the main cremation ground of Ahmedabad on the opposite bank and there was the Central Jail about a mile north of the Ashram. People believed that Gandhiji had established his Ashram where Sage Dadhichi had his Ashram in the olden days of Hindu Mythology. Gandhiji had described the joy of bathing along with the beauty of the Ashram in his letter to Mr. West. Very often he used to say that on one side they had the jail and on the other, the cremation ground, so the inmates need not fear either of them. Thus joy and fearlessness were the two lasting feelings of the Ashram.

Mahadev and Durga also experienced the same emotions when they went to live in the Ashram — joy born out of a concentrated

effort at mental purification and fearlessness born out of the non-violent struggle for Swarajya.

Mostly Mahadev's home was with Gandhiji, in the railway trains and at times in jail. But it was at the Ashram that he had a real 'home'. For Durgaben this was the permanent home where she lived alone, always waiting for Mahadev till 'Bablo' was born in 1924. For twelve years even after Narayan(Bablo)'s birth she had to continue waiting, but the pangs of separation must have been partly lightened by 'Bablo's presence.

Maniben and Narahari had come to stay in the Ashram before they went to Champaran. Mahadev and Durga came to the Ashram from Champaran. But both the couples had a very close friendship even before they came to Gandhiji. This friendship resulted in oneness when they came to the Ashram. Maniben has given in her *Kathanak* a nice description of this period :

"The land for the Ashram was bought around the time we joined the Ashram. There was no well there. It was decided to start digging a well as the river water could not be drunk without boiling.

"Our huts were built of mats. The floor was just dust. Once it suddenly rained I had only one cot. Both of us sat on the cot under an umbrella. Underneath the cot the water flowed as if in a river. Bapu came to know of our plight and sent someone asking us to join him. We said we were safe, he should not worry. After this experience, Bapu felt the need for haste in the building work by giving help to the labourers.

"Bapu asked Shankarlal to stand on the river bank and asked all of us to work along with the labourers. Two pies were paid for bringing up one hodful of sand.

"Both Narahari and myself got twenty-four pies each for bringing in twelve hods each. That day there was no time to cook. We decided to eat whatever we could get from the money we earned for the labour. We brought gram, puffed rice and dates and some milk. When we started eating, Mahadev came there and asked, "What is all this ?" We told him, "We will eat only what we can get from our earning from our labour today !" So he said, "Here is my contribution, I shall earn it through labour." We ate together and enjoyed it."²

Maganlal was Gandhiji's nephew, and was with him in South Africa. He was really the life of the Ashram, as he systematised its management; introduced disciplines, and brought technique to the Ashram crafts. He died very young. Mahadev wrote in his obituary, "Untrained people like myself sought warmth from him."

With the unceasing effort of the workers and the students of the Ashram under Maganlal's leadership, the prickly shrubs from the rocks and the sand and the cacti from the river bank were removed and vegetables were planted. Many neem trees were planted at regular distance and in a very short time the barren land became green with vegetables.

Mahadev was feeling blessed that he could stay with Gandhiji. He was fully engrossed in his work. He did occasionally remember his old father in Dihen, also his wife, who was waiting for him at Sabarmati, but his mind was filled with 'Bapu'. Nevertheless, Gandhiji realised that he had brought Mahadev away on a different path from those of his father's aspirations. He wrote a letter to Haribhai on 5-4-1918 on the train, whilst going to Nadiad from Vasad :

"Sujna Bhaishri,

I had decided a long time ago to write to you whenever I could seize a chance, but I was too busy for a long time and then for a long while the idea slipped from my memory. You will please forgive me

Let me beg to state that you have committed no error in entrusting Mahadev to me. The experience he is having here is quite a necessity for the development of his soul. And it is not true that money confers happiness to one and all. Mahadev is so constituted by nature that money and physical comforts cannot give peace to his soul. My reading of Durga, moreover, tells me that her outlook on life is going to be the same as Mahadev's is. She, too, is gaining invaluable experience.

As for me, I must say that the coming of both of them into my circle has been nothing but a valuable gain to me. I was on the look out for a helpful companion who should be at once a man of high character, a loving heart and deep learning. Mahadev fulfilled all the requisites and ended my search. And I had never dreamt that Durga would turn out to be as useful to me as she has verily been. God's ways are *par excellence* unique.

All I wish and pray is that you cease to have any worry for the couple and that you bless them in their march to life.

Respectfully yours,
Mohandas Gandhi"³

Sixteen days after this letter Haribhai met Gandhiji whilst he was going to Delhi from Bombay. Mahadev's diary is a record of Gandhiji's daily work — Gandhiji's diary. Rarely has Mahadev recorded his personal incidents. This meeting of the two fathers had

been recorded perhaps because Gandhiji was one of them. The note is brief.

"My father met us at night at Navsari Station. He was very happy to see me. Bapu merely asked when the train started, 'You are relieved, aren't you?' My father replied in the affirmative after a few seconds."

Haribhai was older to Gandhiji by eight years. But he respected Gandhiji highly. This brief conversation in a railway compartment, the pleasing sight of the charming face of his son like Magnolia Grandiflora, and the pleasing touch of his back at the time he touched his father's feet, must have been for Haribhai a fond remembrance for days afterwards.

Gandhiji thought of Durga too whilst going to Nadiad from Vasad. He gently rebuked her for not writing to him and wrote -

"Chi. Durga,

I don't know if you have forgotten me, but I haven't. Anandiben has given me all the news about you. You have been separated from Mahadev longer than I had expected. I have told him that he can go to see you whenever he likes. But if you wish, I am prepared to send him even immediately. I must at the same time let you know that Mahadev is having very elevating experiences here, and you are sure to gain through them. If your perception of this fact can allay your pain of separation, Mahadev may stay on. But there is one risk there also. If it happens that I am involved in a struggle more serious than even this one, he cannot be spared for you, the while it lasts, even though you may want him then. So this is just the right time for him to pay you a visit. If you are tired of your stay there, you can come here. But I have some doubt whether your stay in Nadiad is feasible. It is also certain you cannot get here the benefits you are having there; just the same I am at your disposal and will follow your wishes.

Blessings,
Mohandas"⁴

As a son of an Anavil, Mahadev had not done chores involving physical labour. As already mentioned, the aunt at Junagadh was a strict disciplinarian. She made the boys perform many of the tasks themselves. But even during those days Chhotubhai used to take over the more strenuous tasks from Mahadev as already mentioned. During the period of his service with the bank, he travelled a lot, but he used to take a servant for his personal work. Thus he was not used to doing many of the chores when he came to the Ashram. But devotion to Gandhiji was the principal element which shaped his life. Just as this devotion gave him the added strength to perform

intellectual tasks beyond his normal capacity, it also removed his mental inhibitions and accustomed him to performing physical tasks in a very short time. If Gandhiji could lift up the buckets of the Ashram toilets, if Gandhiji could cut vegetables in the kitchen, why could he not do both? Mahadev did not need to read Tolstoy or Ruskin on physical labour! He did not need to attend 'work camps'. His devotion to Gandhiji was enough to teach him new lessons daily and shape up his life.

It was through the list of rules for the Ashram that Mahadev had first contacted Gandhiji. When he got the opportunity to join the Ashram, Mahadev put in every mental and physical effort to become part of the Ashram life.

Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati was the training centre in service to the country for volunteers from all over the country. According to Gandhiji the training of a Satyagrahi began with inner purity. And so all the rules of the Satyagraha Ashram were connected with it. Once the Ashram was established Gandhiji turned these rules into vows. Gandhiji considered truth, non-violence, non-possession, non-stealing and other points of good conduct as social values rather than individual virtues as they were considered till then. He insisted that if these values cannot be adhered to in a society, they would not mean anything. Gandhiji wanted to have his Ashram establishing social values. Mahadev accepted Ashram life fully because he had full faith in this premise.

Insistence on the varied use of the new buildings, in the Ashram grew as they were built. The greatest emphasis was on the practice of the vows. It was decided that the people who observed vows would stay on the eastern side of the Ashram Road, which was a narrow road covered with metal pieces then and those endeavouring to practise the vows should stay in the houses on the western side. As a result almost all the families excepting those of Maganlal and Gandhiji stayed on the western side while the unmarried ones stayed on the eastern side.

The training in the Ashram consisted of learning to serve, to live a simple life, and to be constantly on the alert. Service, simplicity and self-restraint, these formed the three supports of the Ashram's three-legged stool. Mahadev had a natural inclination for serving others. He had to develop some skills necessary for service. He was never present for long periods in the Ashram but whenever he was there, he would increase his skill by undertaking the work to be done by other Ashramites.

The task of cleaning the toilets was a prerequisite of staying in all the Ashrams run by Gandhiji. This task was the first one allotted not only to the permanent residents, but even to those who came to

stay for a few days. The main intention was to remove the mental inhibitions regarding this work. In those days buckets were used for toilets. Living in South Africa, Gandhiji had discovered an improved method of cleaning them so that it became fairly tidy and not at all disgusting; but nevertheless, that work was difficult for those who had an inherent aversion to it. For Mahadev it was not so. He learned toilet-cleaning quickly and introduced his usual orderliness and tidiness to it.

Another skill was that of cloth-making. Gandhiji had not even known the difference between a spinning-wheel and a weaving-loom when he mentioned the former in his book *Hind Swaraj*. But because of his insistence on saying what he thought and doing what he said, he introduced and developed the craft of cloth-making in the workshop at the Ashram. Cloth-making included all the processes of spinning, weaving and sewing. Maganlal was engrossed in Khadi-work. Later on Vinoba and Balkoba became quite proficient in Khadi-work. Mahadev was not an expert at cloth-making because he did not have the time required to master the art. Nevertheless, he did try to ply the loom. His spinning was praised because of the excellence of his yarn. Experienced spinners envied the fine, even and strong yarn he spun. He had learnt to cook to some extent before he came to Gandhiji. He improved upon it after joining him, more so during the tours. Otherwise it would have been surprising if he even got a chance to light the fire when he had a *Ginni* (housewife) like Durgaben. For Durgaben cooking was never a problem. But it certainly was a new experience for her to help in the Ashram kitchen where food had to be cooked for a large number of people. She did the toilet-cleaning only because she saw Ba and Bapu doing it. Spinning was as natural to every Ashramite as taking a bath. But Gandhiji had entrusted some extra training in cloth-making to some of the Ashram women like Durgaben. He had encouraged the women to move around in the villages of the Vijapur Taluka, and learn the skill of spinning in the old way from the ladies there, as well to understand the construction of the spinning-wheel. Moreover, he had also asked these women to teach the women, who from Ahmedabad and Bombay wanted to learn, spinning. Mrs. Pettit of Bombay learnt spinning from Durgaben.

Life at the Ashram was simple. Gandhiji often gave object lessons of simplicity to the newcomers. He asked Maniben to donate her jewellery for the national cause. The jewellery that Durgaben received from her maternal side, remained in Valsad with her elder sister. Except for a pair of red ivory bangles on her arms, no piece of jewellery appeared on her body after her joining the Ashram. She probably had no inclination to put on good clothes, and in those

days Khadi did not make good clothes. Mahadev was so engrossed in his work that he was never conscious of the clothes he wore. But both Durgaben and Mahadev's personalities had an exclusive dignity of their own. Any newcomer felt respect for Durgaben on looking at her dignified countenance. Whatever clothes Mahadev wore, suited him. His charming personality provided grace to all his clothes. There was hardly any furniture in the house. There was a hand-mill for grinding corn, a fireplace and some cooking utensils, a spinning-wheel and cotton-slivers and pen and ink for writing – this was all the furnishing of the Desai home. The only possession was that of books.

The emphasis on restraint in the Ashram was mainly exercise of the vows of celibacy and control of the palate. It has already been mentioned that most of the married couples of the Ashram had not taken the vow of celibacy. But they had accepted the ideal of leading a self-restrained marital life and tried to achieve this ideal. Mahadev and Durga belonged to this group.

Durgaben's cooking was so delicious that it tested the vow of control of the palate. For years together the Desai family consumed boiled vegetables and spiceless *dal* whilst eating in the Ashram kitchen. Later on when Mahadev asked for permission to cook and eat at home, Gandhiji granted it. The reason for this was not, however, in order to indulge their palates. Mahadev ate three times a day. A casual taking of aniseeds or some such thing at anyone's house became a meal which deprived him of his real meal. This insistence was not due to the vow, but to preserve his health and to save himself from over-eating. Later on he had persuaded Babla also to observe a rule of eating four times a day. This helped him in self-discipline and was not based on the vow of the control of palate.

Gandhiji's Ashram was a place for active experiments in collective living. That collective life was emphatically portrayed through four community activities. The Ashram's common kitchen was a major means of nurturing national integration. Indian food has a lot of variety. People insist on eating the food they are used to. Thus the first important lesson of integration could be learnt when people agreed to eat together. People of different temperaments are particular about food and so to run a common kitchen without a quarrel is in itself an arduous task. It was Durgaben who had to undergo this penance far more often than Mahadev. Because she had to accept the responsibilities of the common kitchen even when she cooked at home. Gandhiji had allowed them to cook and eat at home with the pre-condition of not neglecting the responsibility of the common kitchen! One man wanted hot *chapaties*. How could it always be possible to serve him hot *chapaties* when about three

hundred people were being served food? Initially there was to be *ghee* on the *chapatties*. This led to complaints that those who ate more *chapatties* get more *ghee*. Some people could not even imagine that such petty complaints and quarrels could take place in Gandhiji's Ashram! But it was a fact that they did take place. Later on Mahadev commented occasionally: "Bapu is a doctor, so naturally patients will collect around him." It must be said that Mahadev and Durgaben, and specially Durgaben, did not lose their individualities even amongst so many peculiarities and differences of the Ashramites.

Collective cleaning was the next activity. Every member of the Ashram, from the youngest to the oldest, spent some time in cleaning the Ashram. The work was divided amongst different groups, who cleaned the buildings, the roads, the area surrounding the wells, the toilets and organised the garbage dumps. This function was like a cultural revolt, protest against the disgust associated with cleaning toilets, etc., in the veins of traditions in the name of *varna-vyavasthā* and cleanliness.

A special name was given to the third collective activity, called the *Sutra-yagna*. The spinning-wheel was at the centre of the reconstruction of society according to Gandhiji's conception. The spinning-wheel was to be regularly used as an offering to the society for the country's freedom, not only for one's own clothes. Gandhiji held that any work dedicated to society was a sacrifice. Through the spinning-wheel Gandhiji had given to the country an implement which could be used equally by the young and the old, the sick and the sturdy, to give as offering to the Nation.

The fourth collective activity was prayers. Gandhiji had commenced various experiments in prayer since his days in South Africa. As different types of people joined the Ashram, more types of prayers were added. In South Africa, changes like, '*Muslimjana* . . .' or at times '*Christianjana* . . .' were made in the *bhajan*, *Vaishnavjana* *To Tene Kahie* because people of every sect felt that the *bhajan* gave a beautiful description of their ideal person. Many scholars had come together in the Ashram particularly for the Rashtriya Shala. Gandhiji's magnetic personality was the reason. These scholars collected *bhajans* of their liking. Considerable discussions took place regarding them. Gandhiji had requested Pandit Vishnu Digamber Paluskar to send someone particularly suited to his Ashram. Pandit Narayan Moreshwar Khare was his selection. It was indeed an excellent selection. Khare Shastri was a child of devotion and classical music. He would set the songs selected by other scholars to classical *ragas*. Initially Panditji would sing them and others would follow. The *Ashram Bhajanawali* edited by Pandit

Khare is a milestone in the revival of cultural, devotional music in India. Its popularity is proved by the sale of hundreds of thousand of copies by its forty editions.

Whenever Gandhiji was there in the Ashram, he would inquire about the Ashram, answer questions if there were any, say a few words about some places he had visited or about some subjects in his thoughts, after the evening prayers. Mahadev would invariably take notes. Narahari had edited a book named *Gandhiji nu-Gitā Shukshan*, from the notes concerning talks on the Gītā. The notes of Vinobaji's lectures in Mahilashram, Wardha, are also found in Mahadev's diary.

Gandhiji went in for revolutionary changes through community work. These changes were in the areas of food through the common kitchen, culture through collective cleaning, economics through spinning together in the community, spiritually through collective prayers. Mahadev agreed with these changes implicitly. He had considered them instruments for his inner purification. The Ashram Goshalā was also an important section. Gandhiji was insistent of cow care even more than prohibiting cow-slaughter. Hundreds of Ashramites got only cow's milk.

There were some typical characteristics of the Ashram. Many Ashramites slept under the sky and bathed in the cold water of the river. Its hostel had the regularity of doing all work at the tolling of the bell. Its eye-catching cleanliness, and the ennobling handicrafts were its speciality. These characteristics were not the result of one person's efforts. No doubt, the contribution of Gandhiji's vision as well as the organisational capacity of Maganlal, Narandas and Narahari must have played a very big role in it. But the contribution of Vinoba's penance, Kakasaheb's culture, Kishorelal's philosophical outlook, Khare Shastri's music, Sadhu Surendraji's spiritual pursuits and Mahadev's devotion were certainly not inconsiderable. All these votaries went on increasing the value of the common integral penance by each other's support, warmth and good society. The most helpful factors in this penance according to them were the deliberate control of senses, service to the people without expecting any reward and a vision which stretched out to the world. The Ashram was the sum-total of the spiritual influence of all these people.

People from all parts of India came to the Ashram as a result of Gandhiji's efforts and travels. In a very short time the Ashram became a miniature India and a training camp for Satyagraha. When the visitors returned to their homes they carried the Satyagraha culture along with other pleasant memories of the Ashram. The sense of the spiritual background of Satyagraha also carried to a large

degree to the people in all parts of India. Gandhiji's constant travels refreshed this feeling. Old students of the Ashram from various places repeatedly revisited the Ashram, met Gandhiji and breathed new life into their movements. However, Gandhiji was not the main source of the continuing atmosphere of Satyagraha in the Ashram. Sometimes even Gandhiji became a guest in the Ashram. The major contribution to this atmosphere were the people who lived a life of constant service, simplicity and self-control.

Women clearly made a significant contribution to the Ashram's atmosphere. Of course, all the women, except the girl students in the hostel had followed the father, husband or some other relation to the Ashram. Supporters of the present 'Women's Liberation' movement would have been surprised at the emphasis placed on equality in the Ashram's atmosphere.

Mahadev would bring water from the well while Durgaben cooked; Narahari would wash clothes and Maniben squeezed out the water, dried and folded them; Chhaganlal would clean vessels while Kashiben cooked in the common kitchen — thus all tasks were performed together on an equal basis. Maintaining the accouts of the Ashram store-room was considered a difficult task because hundreds of people had to be catered for. Some people would return material they had taken for use, some would return a part of the material taken and other such problems had to be dealt with. Thus the store-keeper had an onerous duty; and so people hesitated to undertake the responsibility of the store-keeper. Bapu came to know about the problem. He found a solution; why not entrust account-keeping to the women? There was not a single error in the accounts at the end of the month when women handled the store-room! Durgaben was extremely happy.

Mahadev used to remain more of an introvert in this atmosphere. He had a better opportunity to reflect upon Gandhiji's thoughts, expressed during their travels, in the Ashram, when he could communicate with spiritual pursuers like Kedarnathji, Kishorelal Mashruwala, and Surendraji. By family tradition Kishorelalji belonged to the Swaminarayan sect. But his thinking was purely rational. Valjibhai G. Desai also stayed off and on in the Ashram for some years. If anyone in the Ashram read more than Mahadev, it was Valjibhai. But the more Valjibhai read, he wrote in short sentences and absolutely briefly. Discussions about literature took place mostly with Kakasaheb and Narahari. Swami Anand or Jugatram Dave would participate if they could find time from their *Navajivan* work. Vinoba, whose contribution would probably have been the greatest in terms of philosophical discussion, had gone away after one year for further studies! Later on Jamnalalji took him

to Wardha. When he was in Sabarmati, he used to be engrossed in his own thoughts apart from the time when he taught Gujarati and Sanskrit to the students and inspired them to bathe in the Sabarmati river in severe cold in the early mornings. Hence, there was not much scope for philosophic discussions with him.

Mahadev's place even amongst these brilliant colleagues was unique. He had the freedom to leave the Ashram and return to it as Gandhiji's secretary. That was not the only thing; his capacity to understand Bapu's thoughts and his merit of simplifying those thoughts for the common man's understanding was what procured him his unique place in the Ashram. His extraordinary intelligence and clear thinking did not keep him away from others. He shared that excellence with others. He had dedicated all his sincere action solely to Gandhiji.

Mahadev could discuss with Gandhiji; but his motive was to understand and if possible to adopt his point of view, and not merely to argue. Here is a discussion about re-birth :

"As we were returning from the lecture which Bapu had delivered at Patna the other night, I had a talk with Mazhar-ul-Huq in which I had expressed my doubts about re-incarnation. Referring to the statement Bapu said, 'Mahadev, I never imagined you were that sort of man. I, for one, would not call a man a Hindu if he does not believe in re-incarnation.'

" 'Call me a non Hindu or a Christian or whatever you like', I answered, 'but why should I hide what I honestly feel? It's a question of conviction. If I could be satisfied about the truth of the theory, I would become a believer.'

"As I began to give reasons for my disbelief, Bapu cut me short and said, 'There is no need to argue. Don't you see that every moment millions of beings are born and millions die? That itself suggests that there must be re-incarnation.'

"I submitted: 'Could any man ever think of becoming a horse or a horseman, according to the dictum (As a man thinketh so he becometh after death), which is one of the props of the theory of re-incarnation?' He replied, 'But that is not quite to the point. Just the same, Anna Kingsford used to say that she felt that many Frenchmen would be born as tigers after their deaths. What does that statement show?'

" 'Nothing,' I affirmed, 'if it shows anything, it only means that Anna Kingsford got a severe shock at the wicked deeds of those people — and she expressed her feelings of shame and disgust in strong language.' Bapu remained gravely silent. At last I told him, 'I will try to believe in the theory.' He then said, 'He who does not believe in it cannot have any real

faith in the regeneration of fallen souls. At least that man who wants to serve society ought to possess that faith.' 'To that extent I suppose that theory to be true,' I replied. 'And when I am fully convinced, I will accept it whole-heartedly.' Then I showed him the dialogue between Gottfried and Christopher from *John Christopher*, Vol. II and said, 'Is this not what you want of me — to have faith, to observe and to pray?' He said, 'Yes'. Then bringing the talk to a close he said, 'You must read *Life Beyond Death* by Arnold.'⁵⁵

In Kochharab too when Mahadev met Gandhiji for the first time, there was a similar, philosophical discussion. Gandhiji and Mahadev both liked such discussions. Outsiders at times did feel that Mahadev was not trying to argue with Gandhiji but to accept his point because of his devotion to him.

However occasionally, the teacher had to accept the pupil's point of view. A short note from his diary only two months after his joining Gandhiji shows this :

"Last night he preferred to walk the whole distance from the Gujarat Club to the Ashram, despite the earnest entreaty of Ansuyaben to let her take him there in her car. Many topics were discussed in our talks on the way.

"As I am writing a commentary on his book *Sarvodaya*, I said, 'There are some Chapters in it which are really excellent in style and substance, but there are some others which appear slipshod.' He readily accepted my criticism and observed, 'Sometimes I used to have an itch to write and the output was really charming. But sometimes when, on my return home thoroughly exhausted after a whole day's honest work, somebody demanded from me a definite number of columns for the *Indian Opinion*. I would dictate to him, and even say that I did not approve of such and such sentences, but that it could not be helped, as I had no time to seek a better expression. It is quite possible that such parts fall flat.'⁵⁶

When Gandhiji invited Mahadev to join him, he had observed three major virtues in him — honesty, loyalty and efficiency. These virtues were transformed into attachment to truth, devotion and erudition through Mahadev's own efforts and his association with Gandhiji. He had achieved this progress to inculcate the values of the Ashram.

And the key to all this was Mahadev's humility. Shri Kishorelal says in *Gandhi Vichardohan* :

"It is said to be pride to believe that one is somebody, one has got something extraordinary, — to be conscious of body, mind, intellect, learning, art, cleverness, purity, knowledge,

devotion, generosity, observance of vows of merits of courtesy and to move as if carrying one's life which is important. To think least of all these things, just like our healthy limbs is humility or being a zero. Such humility cannot be achieved; but is born in our nature owing to many virtues and a thoughtful life. A humble person does not even realise that he is humble."⁷

Before joining Gandhiji, Mahadev had a natural humility; and it remained firm even when he reached the finale of success and fame. That was the reason why Bapu paid a tribute, saying, "If I am asked what was Mahadev's greatest quality, I would say, it was his ability to reduce himself to zero whenever occasion demanded it."⁸

Mahadev's natural humility was immensely helpful to him in his spiritual pilgrimage. The main reason that he remained ever alert to practise the eleven Ashram vows of i. Truth, ii. Non violence, iii. Chastity, iv. Control of the Palate, v. Non stealing, vi. Non-Possession, vii. Fearlessness, viii. Removal of Untouchability, ix. Bread labour, x. Equality of Religions and xi. Swadeshi, was because he felt that he had to go a long way.

Mahadev's humble nature made him affectionate towards his colleagues and devoted to Gandhiji. Because of his devotion and because he was blessed with innumerable other virtues he gained a unique place among the Ashramites as already mentioned. His love was so overwhelming that his ego was swept away in its flow. No politician or Ashramite was ever jealous of him in spite of his receiving untold publicity and fame during the freedom movement. In a short time after his joining Gandhiji, his colleagues and the country accepted his unique position as only 'Mahadev's position'. Later on this very humility was to be instrumental in his being accepted by even the most staunch opponents of Gandhiji.

Sabarmati Ashram was an emblem of a new yet an age-old tradition. Gandhiji had written a very strong criticism of 'Western civilization' in *Hind Swaraj* in 1909. In the same book he had further suggested the bringing of a culture with its roots in ancient Indian Culture, with its stems reaching out to the future human civilization. Sabarmati Ashram was such a new tree standing on old roots. Once whilst talking about the Ashram, Gandhiji said, "My greatest creation in South Africa is Phoenix. Without it there would not have been Satyagraha in South Africa. There could not be Satyagraha in India without this Ashram. I may be mistaken in this. If so I should be abandoned. I am going to tell the country not to evaluate me on the basis of Champaran or Kheda, but to consider me through the Ashram."⁹

Mahadev imbibed that Ashram culture and explained the Gandhian thought through the basis of the ancient civilization in

such a manner that to-day, even after seventy years, it is relevant for the most modern thinker as well as for the men of thought of the future.

FOOTNOTES .

1. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, p. 33
2. Vanmala Desai, *Naraharibhai* (Guj), pp. 225 to 228 (Selected)
3. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1., pp. 79-80
4. Ibid. pp. 78-79
5. Ibid. pp. 138-139
6. Ibid. p. 35
7. Kishorelal G. Mashruwala, *Gandhi Vichar Dohan* (Guj), p. 19
8. *Harijan*, "Sevagram", 12-8-46
9. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 15, p. 92

CHAPTER XIII

A RIGHTEOUS STRUGGLE

Mahadev's first major function, on joining Gandhiji was to present to the country and to the world the part played by Gandhiji in the dispute between the textile workers and the mill-owners of Ahmedabad. In this task Mahadev found a suitable outlet for his genius. He followed Gandhiji like a shadow as King Dilip followed the cow in *Raghuvansha*. The reports he wrote, full of vitality and realism, provided the material for a book called, *A Righteous Struggle* which is still being reprinted and translated seventy years later.

On the industrial scene the incident which occurred in Ahmedabad in 1918 is a historical event which earned the title "a righteous struggle". In those days the labour movement in India was in its infancy. Gandhiji elevated the movement using the instruments of truth and non-violence. An organisation called Majoor Mahajan was established on the basis of ethical and spiritual values in the city of Ahmedabad. This was an inspirational organisation because of its diverse socially oriented activities and remains an example for group-working to improve labour relations to this day. The most significant contribution was the introduction of arbitrators to settle labour-management disputes, and ensuring that both parties abide by the decisions of arbitration.

A Righteous Struggle reads like a textbook for labour movements adhering to the principles of non-violence, due to Mahadev's accurate explanation of the strategy employed and his detailed reporting. This book will continue to inspire the upholders of non-violence of the future.

Mahadev imparts two valuable lessons in the Foreword to the book's second edition :

"1. Labour is as much wealth as capital, nay it is even more valuable. A Textile mill can, therefore, belong only jointly to both these owners of wealth

"2. When they attain the strength to secure co ownership, the 'owners' will not force them to strike, but will of their own accord embrace them as brothers and make them partners."¹

He goes on to say, "Non-violence yields such extraordinary fruits. This, however, calls for patience, restraint, discipline, unity and faith in the organisation."²

But Mahadev was not interested in talking about himself. He was only eager to project Gandhiji. And so he describes a principle which would challenge any programme of coercion going on in the name of Satyagraha. "It is for this reason that the true Satyagraha creates a code of conduct for himself and treats it as tenets for correct behaviour. He does not go out in search of an opportunity for Satyagraha out of ego or pride, he naturally comes across it. A Satyagrahi cannot help undertaking the struggle."³

A Satyagrahi faces any situation with the help of truth and non-violence and does not try to escape from it.

Whilst describing Gandhiji's activity, Mahadev relates the history of the problem in the industrial field in Ahmedabad at that time: From August, 1917, "the weavers were paid quite satisfactory 'plague bonuses' . . . He found that . . . the bonus had continued to be given even after the cessation of plague, since prices of foodgrains, cloth and other necessities had risen to more than twice, thrice or four times the old prices. The workers . . . were agitated on learning that the mill-owners contemplated stopping the bonus abruptly."⁴

The labour leaders wished that Gandhiji should intervene in the matter. Gandhiji met both the parties, listened to their arguments and convinced both the parties to settle the matter by arbitration. Due to some misunderstanding there was a strike in some mills. Ansuyaben informed Gandhiji that the mill-owners were planning to order a 'lock-out' in answer to the strike. Gandhiji, handing over the responsibility of the work at Kheda to Vallabhbhai, hastened back to Ahmedabad, accompanied by Mahadev.

Mahadev said that Gandhiji "realised that the step taken by those workers after the appointment of arbitrators was improper. He at once apologised to the mill-owners for what had happened, and informed them that the workers were ready to rectify their mistake."⁵

The mill-owners would not agree. They insisted that since the workers resorted to a strike after appointment of arbitrators, the arbitration stood cancelled *ipso facto*. They contended that since they were no longer bound by arbitration, they would dismiss all the workers who were not willing to accept a 20% increase. Gandhiji exerted himself to the utmost to avert this situation but the mill-owners refused to budge an inch.

Gandhiji explained to the labourers as well as to the labour leaders who were asking for 50% that a Satyagrahi does not ask for more nor accept less than what is right.

Mahadev goes on to say :

"An element of doggedness already characterised both the sides. Seeds of unity and strength were sown when the workers formed their own union. The mill-owners also established an association of their own to combat the unity of labour. Not only the whole city of Ahmedabad but the whole of Gujarat and to some extent the whole country was watching this struggle, which continued for about 25 days with great zeal but without any bitterness."⁶

Explaining the significance of this struggle, Mahadev says that Gandhiji entered into the life of the workers and tried to channel their bubbling enthusiasm along useful lines; he tried to share their joys and sorrows; arrangements were made so that workers were free to go for advice at any time during the day. A public meeting was held daily at a fixed place and the issues and principles involved in the struggle were explained through the meeting as well as through daily leaflets.

One day Shri Chhaganlal Gandhi was requesting the workers of the Jugaldas Chawl to attend the morning meeting, when they confronted him with these words, "What is it to Ansuyaben and Gandhiji? They come and go in their car, they eat sumptuous food, but we are suffering death-agonies, attending meetings does not prevent starvation."⁷

These remarks reached Gandhiji. Generally Gandhiji did not mind criticism or censure, but these bitter words which described the situation realistically, pierced his heart. The next morning he went to the meeting. What did his aching heart and his compassionate eyes see there? To quote his own words, "I saw a thousand dejected faces with disappointment writ thereon, instead of the five to ten thousand who used to assemble daily, beaming with self-determination."⁸

Just before this he had heard what the people in Jugaldas Chawl were saying and remarked :

"I felt that the reprimand of the workers was justified. I believe in the divine order and, therefore, I believe that a man is bound to keep to his oath at whatever cost. I believe in it as firmly as I do that I am writing this letter. I also knew that the men sitting before me, were God fearing persons, but this lock-out, prolonged in an unforeseen manner, had tested them beyond their capacity. I was not unmindful of what I had realized during my wide-spread travels in India that hundreds of persons take an oath and break it at the very next moment. I

also knew that the best among us have just a very feeble and irresolute faith in God. I felt that it was a golden opportunity for me that my faith was being tested. I at once got up and announced to the persons present there, 'I cannot tolerate for a minute that you break your pledge. I shall not take any food nor use a car till you get 35% increase or all of you die in the fight for it.'⁹

"It required a poet's pen to describe what happened in the meeting when this was announced. Tears flowed from the eyes of every one present in the meeting. They felt that some serious mistake had been committed, that Gandhiji had been shocked by their weakness, and he had decided to lay down his life for it. Immediately they grasped the situation and standing up one by one they said, 'We shall never fail in our pledge, come what may, even though the heaven fall. We shall not weaken. We shall go to the houses of those who are vacillating and talk to them and will not allow them to weaken. Kindly give up this terrible resolve.' They did not limit themselves to such speeches. By noon, crowds of them had gathered at the Ashram, and pleaded with Gandhiji to give up his oath to fast. Some workers asked for work enthusiastically, some promised to work and give their wages to those who did not or could not work. It was a red-letter day for the Ashram. Even Shankarlal Banker, who had never known physical labour, carried bricks and sand for three or four days in the heat of the sun along with the workers, to enthuse them. Ansuyaben also joined in the work. Men, women and even children in the Ashram participated in the work with great enthusiasm. The enthusiasm and joy of the workers was unbounded. Those who used to complain and grumble at having to labour and used to sit idle, worked with double vigour and zest.

"While this was happening on the one hand, on the other, hundreds of workers, came to Gandhiji with the residents of Jugaldas Chawl, who had taunted him, to express their regret, and to persuade him to give up his resolve to fast. 'We shall not falter even if the strike continues for months. We will give up the mills, do any other work, shall drudge, and even beg but will not break our pledge.'¹⁰

Mahadev goes on to say about the evening meeting :

"The workers' meeting was called in the evening at five o'clock. The leaflet of that day dealt with 'Labour'. It was the first statement of its kind in Gujarati regarding the importance and sanctity of labour. It was direct and straightforward and went straight to the hearts of the readers."¹¹

Finally he did the difficult job of expounding the Gandhian viewpoint by taking up the points under discussion

Let us now look at the popular controversy over Gandhiji's vow. The notion of fasting as a form of protest was a new one for the people of India. It was, however, Gandhiji's firm belief that vows when taken seriously can save a man from demoralization, and he had frequently put it into practice in South Africa. Some people who believed that Gandhiji would not do anything improper were curious. Others who did not have so much faith in him felt that he was desperate and had resorted to this device to coerce the mill-owners. Prof. Anandshanker Dhruva asked on the very first day "I know that this serious decision must have been taken in conformity with your life-long principles, but I would like to know why it has been taken."¹²

There followed a discussion on the spiritual implications of vows.

The mill-workers' struggle which was hitherto of restricted interest assumed a wider significance. When Gandhiji took this serious step even those who till then had remained aloof became concerned. Prof. Anandshanker was one such person. Leaders in different parts of the country also showed great anxiety, and all felt that this dispute should be settled without delay.

Nor were the mill-owners quite unaffected. Ambalalbhai came and sat by Gandhiji for hours requesting him to give up his fast. On the third day many other employers joined him in this request. All were anxious to persuade Gandhiji to break the fast, but not so anxious to see the pledge of the workers fulfilled. Once again Mahadev refers to an important point, "Gandhiji was not unconscious of the fact that the indirect effect of the fast would be coercion of the mill-owners. He frequently explained this aspect to the employers. In his lectures he repeatedly said that even though the oath is vitiated by its coercive effect on the employers, yet it was primarily undertaken to demonstrate to the workers what significance he attached to their pledge and thereby to sustain them."

It was natural that many aspects of the fact were discussed; moreso when a person of Gandhiji's stature was fasting! It devolved on to Mahadev to present all the aspects realistically to the country and the world. He further says "Some mill-owners told Gandhiji 'We will give 35% increase to workers this time for your sake.' Gandhiji flatly turned down the offer and said, 'Do not give 35% out of pity for me, but do so to respect the workers' pledge, and to give them justice.'"¹³

Mahadev of course made reference to Gandhiji's physical condition. Gandhiji went on fasting. Instead of causing physical

weakness, the fast seemed to add to his vigour. Attempts to persuade him to give up his fast continued to come from many directions, including the arguments put forth by Ambalal Sarabhai thus: 'It would be intolerable if workers defied us frequently counting on the support of outsiders. If this happens, there would be nothing like discipline among them. In that case we shall have no prestige. We will immediately concede 35 per cent if you keep yourself away from them for all time in future, and leave matters between us and the workers entirely to us.' Mahadev's reaction to this was: "This was a very exorbitant demand. It was impossible that Gandhiji, who always fought at the dictates of his conscience against injustice, moral turpitude and exploitation, would agree to abstain from serving labour for all time."¹⁴

And so he refused to give an undertaking.

During all these arguments Gandhiji could not get rid of the thoughts that his fast was pressurising the mill-owners and so he accepted a compromise. The point of arbitration, accepted by both sides at the beginning of the struggle was acceptable to Gandhiji even at that time. "If the spirit of the workers' pledge is maintained, then they would accept the Arbitrator's verdict," was what Gandhiji agreed to. Thus a compromise could be worked out. The compromise formula presented was 35 % increase on the first day to uphold the labourers' pledge, 20 % increase on the second day to uphold the mill owners' vow and on the third day to accept the increase as per the arbitrator's verdict. It was agreed upon by both sides to give three months' time to the arbitrator for due investigations, and 27 ½ % increase to be given in the interim period. Prof. Anandshankerbhar was the choice as the arbitrator, in spite of the fact that he had questioned the propriety of the fast. Gandhiji immediately accepted the choice as he had full faith in his integrity. Mahadev said, "It was but proper that the responsibility was placed on Prof. Anandshanker, as he had taken an active interest in the dispute since the day of the fast, and he accepted the responsibility with pleasure." Gandhiji felt that the labourers' demand was right. The mill owners talked of their 'vow' which appeared like that of a king, victimising his subject by more taxes and declaring that it was his pledge. But the fact of his fast bringing pressure even to some extent on the mill-owners hurt Gandhiji's sense of non-violence and Mahadev quotes him as saying, "I considered the pledges of both. My fast intervened. I could not tell them 'I will break my fast if you give me what I demand.' I felt that would be cowardice on my part."¹⁵

All parties were happy at the compromise. The main point in Gandhiji's expression of happiness was that during the whole struggle bitterness was almost absent.

Mahadev did not deem it essential to answer the criticisms, specially those aimed at Gandhiji's fast — of the 22 days' struggle. He explained Gandhiji's soul-searching by quoting from a letter written to Ambalal Sarabhai, "Respect your sense of justice more than your desire to break my fast . . . The workers will be able to bear what they get justly."¹⁶

The real soul-searching was revealed whilst addressing the inmates of the Ashram, ". . . When I look back at the compromise without inadvertence or pride, I feel that I could never accept it. But the error here is due to my vow to fast. . . ."

Mahadev had also declared as false criticism that the mill-owners accepted Gandhiji's demand because they pitied him 'Considering the arguments the mill owners put forth before the compromise and the number of days they took to do so clearly shows that they did not accept the workers' demand due to generosity. Moreover, even before the decision of Anandshanker, the arbitrator, many workers started getting 35% and even more than a 35% raise. This also indicated that sooner or later the mill-owners would have had to give the 35 % raise.'

In the last leaflet of mill-owners, they had claimed to have saved Gandhiji's life by their generosity, by quoting Dr. Annie Besant's telegram to Ambalalbhai which read. "For sake of India persuade the owners to compromise and save Gandhi's life." Mahadev's reaction, "Hardly anything can be said about this I suggest that the readers should read that leaflet and the last leaflet by the workers, together." And then Mahadev picked up a telegram from the heap of mail for Gandhiji and said, "Very few people would be aware that among many telegrams on that very day, Gandhiji received the following from Miss Faering, a Danish Nun, 'Man cannot show greater love than that which comes through sacrificing one's life for our brethren.'"

The arbitrator, Shri Anandshanker, gave his decision after 4 months and 20 days.

"I . . . consider it proper to give a 35 per cent increase for the remaining period of the dispute . . . they should pay the difference of 7½ % in addition to the 27 ½ % now being paid."¹⁷

Thus Gandhiji's claim that "We would be able to get 35% from the arbitrator", proved correct

Mahadev's opinion was, "Thanks to Gandhiji's penance, Ahmedabad — and through Ahmedabad the whole of India — had the benefit of this straight, noble and righteous struggle. In different parts of India, many times in the past struggles had taken place between the mill-owners and workers, but not one of them was

conducted as was this one, with clean weapons, on the strength of will-power rather than of wealth, and with complete sweetness. In no struggle after that was the result so beneficial and ennobling to both the sides."¹⁸

Mahadev's contribution to the struggle in the form of his articles and notes was any day of greater value than that of an ordinary journalist. He wrote articles that helped the people to get the correct picture of the problem based on Gandhiji's public speeches, his personal talks and discussions and occasionally his letters. Moreover, he has analysed and explained the strategy at different points of time during the struggle like a proficient strategist. How could Mahadev miss the opportunity describing Gandhiji's character and its admirable points? In all the articles he had carefully brought out the special features of the non-violent struggle. Mahadev drew attention to the fact that due to the constructive policy of the movement (i) workers were saved from bargaining that might have been full of snares, (ii) their enthusiasm turned to a direction that was constructive; (iii) Gandhiji and his colleagues got the opportunity to enter the lives of the workers.

It can certainly be said that Mahadev's infinite faith in Gandhiji had made him over optimistic in his book, *A Righteous Struggle*, but it has to be noted that in spite of his endless devotion he had not exaggerated anywhere.

Before concluding this section on the righteous struggle, let us attend to what Gandhiji said to his close associates of the Ashram after the morning prayer meeting there on the 17th March.

Since 1909 when Gandhiji wrote *Hind Swaraj*, he was wedded to a mission. He had a vivid concept of Indian culture. In the last paragraph of *Hind Swaraj* he dedicated his life to re-establish that culture after understanding the soul of India and that culture became the centre of Gandhiji's life in all the years thereafter. Gandhiji told his close associates :

"The step I have just now taken is a very grave one, but at the back of it there stands a great idea. It is grave because, on hearing of this all those who know me in India will be very much pained, be almost in an agony of grief. But at the same time, I have here an opportunity to convey to them a beautiful idea, and I should not miss it. This is the motive behind my action. For the last twenty days, I have been mixing with ten thousand mill-hands. In my presence, they took a pledge in the name of God. At the time, they did so with great enthusiasm. Whatever type of people they are, they all believe at any rate that God exists. I must impress upon the minds of the mill-hands what it is to take a pledge. I must show to them what I

can do for a pledge; if I did not, I would be a coward. For a man who brags of clearing seven feet, not to clear even one, is impotence. Well, then, to keep those ten thousand men from falling, I took this step. This was why I took the vow and its impact was electrifying. I had never expected this. The thousands of men present there shed tears. They awoke to the reality of their soul, a new consciousness stirred in them and they got to stand by their pledge. I was instantly persuaded that *dharma* had not vanished from India, that people do respond to an appeal to their soul."¹⁹

Finally Mahadev quoted the happiness Gandhiji felt at the direct action and demonstration of fasting, in his own words :

"At the moment I am full of happiness. When in the past, I had taken such a vow my mind had not known such peace. I felt the physical needs then. This time I do not feel the physical needs at all. My mind is completely quiet. I feel like bearing my soul to you. But I am also excited with joy."²⁰

FOOTNOTES :

1. M. D., *A Righteous Struggle*, pp. v/vi
2. Ibid. p. vi
3. Ibid. p. 3
4. Ibid. p. 4
5. Ibid. p. 6
6. Ibid. p. 7
7. Ibid. pp. 24-25
8. Ibid. p. 25
9. Ibid. p. 25
10. Ibid. pp. 25-26
11. Ibid. p. 27
12. Ibid. pp. 29-30
13. Ibid. p. 31
14. Ibid. pp. 31-32
15. Ibid. p. 34
16. Ibid. p. 33
17. Ibid. p. 91
18. Ibid. p. 37
19. *CWMG*, Vol. 14, pp. 260 to 262 (Selected)
20. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. I, p. 68

CHAPTER XIV

KHEDA SATYAGRAHA

In order to understand Mahadev's movements, it is necessary to follow Gandhiji's activities which in turn are inextricably linked to the history of the country. Mahadev realised that occasions for Satyagraha came readily to Gandhiji's attention — one such occasion was the case of the farmers in Kheda.

The monsoon of 1917 released 70 inches of rainfall on the Kheda District instead of the usual 30 inches. The seed which had been planted was washed away, the monsoon crops rotted and an epidemic of rats destroyed what survived of the Rabi crop. To alleviate the hardship caused by harsh weather conditions, the law states that if the crop is considered to be less than 37 ½ % but more than 25 %, the cultivators are allowed to pay half of their land revenue assessment a year later; if the harvest is estimated at less than 25% the collection of the entire assessment is postponed; if the crop fails in the following year, the portion of the land revenue, postponed in the previous year, is remitted altogether. Most of the cultivators of Kheda were unaware of this rule. The Government employees took advantage of this ignorance and began to collect the revenue. Mohanlal Pandya, from Kathlal, became aware of the abuse and victimisation of the people by the ruthless officials and advised against payment of revenue. He invited two members of the Bombay Legislative Assembly elected from Gujarat, Vitthalbhai Patel and Gokaldas Parekh to assess the situation themselves. The Home Rule Leagues of Kathlal and Nadiad collected a total of 22,000 signatures and sent this with an application requesting deferment of revenue payment to the Government of Bombay.

Gokaldas Parekh and Vitthalbhai Patel came to Nadiad on December 12th. They were accompanied on their tours of the villages by Ganesh Vasudev Mavlankar, Secretary of the Gujarat Vidya Sabha and other workers. Prior to this visit, Gandhiji had written from Champaran advising the workers to observe the greatest

restraint, to use courteous language in their discussions and speeches and above all to adhere strictly to facts.

After examining the conditions in 20 villages, the Legislators entered into discussions with the Collector, the outcome of which was that land revenue collection from 104 villages of Nadiad, Mehemdavad, Kapadvanj Talukas would be postponed. The amount involved, Rs. 1,75,868/- represented only 7.4% of the district's total revenue. Even this small relief was not communicated immediately to the farmers concerned.

Meanwhile the Government officials continued to abuse and intimidate the people, partly because they feared the outbreak of a popular resistance movement. The Talati in Dethap village, for example, used foul and abusive language to order the people to pay, even if they had to sell their homes, jewels, cattle or their wives and children....! One Muslim cultivator was forced to marry off his 10 year old daughter so as to borrow Rs. 15/- from his son-in-law to pay his revenue. Simultaneously, officers continued to force people to contribute to war loans. On hearing about these incidents, Gandhiji wrote: "Please do not let Mavlankar forget about Talatis' brutal behaviour.. It is necessary to expose the behaviour of the officials."

Even though Gandhiji sympathised with the British Government which was at war, he was not prepared to tolerate injustice. He considered it his duty to draw attention to violation of human rights. This violation continued in Kheda with the Government issuing circulars to its officials, sometimes using threatening language, urging them to be more strict in collecting revenue.

In January, the leaders of the Kheda District and the Members of the Gujarat Sabha met Gandhiji in Ahmedabad. At this meeting it was decided to advise the cultivators against paying the land revenue dues. Gandhiji insisted that one of the workers of the Gujarat Sabha should accompany him and campaign with him in Kheda. Vallabhbhai volunteered his services and Nadiad was chosen as the Headquarters for the Satyagraha. Gandhiji then left for Champaran. The Members of The Gujarat Sabha requested that a meeting be arranged with Mr Pratt, the Commissioner of the Northern Division, Government of Bombay. Mr. Pratt agreed to meet The Secretaries of the Sabha but refused entry to the Members of the Executive Committee who had accompanied them. The Commissioner was rude and arrogant to Secretaries, G. V. Mavlankar and Krishnalal Desai, threatening to ban the Sabha if it did not withdraw the advice it had issued to the people of Kheda.

An emergency meeting of the Executive Committee was held at which a resolution was passed upholding the decision it had taken to

advise the farmers. A copy of the resolution was sent to Mr. Pratt. Gandhiji sent a telegram to the Sabha advising them to continue collecting information on the oppression of farmers in Kheda. Always conscious of self-respect, he also told them to write a strong but courteous letter to express resentment against the insult of those gentlemen who the Commissioner refused to see. Gandhiji then suggested that movement be started to prevent the collection of the revenue as an answer to Mr. Pratt's threat. Mahadev was delighted with this guidance. In a letter sent to follow the telegram Gandhiji says: "Commissioner has finally shown himself in his true colours...."¹ and in a letter to the workers at Kheda: "If we do our duty fearlessly, the public too will draw from it a wonderful object lesson."¹

In Bombay two M.L.A.s, Patel and Parekh requested the Revenue Member, Mr. Carmichael, to conduct an independent inquiry into the matter, supporting this request with documentation they had collected. Mr. Carmichael's response was terse — as the Collector in Kheda was a responsible Indian, the Government did not intend to intervene. Undaunted Patel-Parekh took their case to the Members of the Bharat Samaj and succeeded in enticing Shri Amritlal Thakkar to visit Kheda. Thakkar's subsequent article was published in the *Times of India*.

The Government officials, from the village-officer (Talati) to the Governor, displayed a terrible arrogance and a complete disregard for the suffering of the people, whose protectors they claimed to be! The Collector of Kheda District, the "responsible Indian" in whose capable hands the Government were happy to let the matter be issued a statement in response to the Sabha's notice. The statement contains the following: "If .. anyone influenced by the wrong advice, which is being given to them, refused to pay his land-revenue dues, I shall be compelled to take stringent legal measures against him."²

In another notification, he denounced the Gujarat Sabha Members as "outsiders". The Collector claimed that he had ordered the collection of land-revenue dues only after detailed and careful consideration. In fact, the timing of his order meant that he had three full days to conduct detailed and careful investigation of the 600 villages of the District.

Gandhiji had been involved in the Kheda dispute only in an advisory capacity but as the situation developed, he decided to intervene directly. The factors which led to this decision were:

— the obstinacy and oppression of the Government officials;

— the manner in which the Government tried to prove that the cultivators were liars;

— the determination of the cultivators shown by the Sabha workers.

On February 5th Gandhiji went to the Governor in Bombay and asked for an independent inquiry to be conducted. The Governor refused this request

Gandhiji arrived in Nadiad on the 16th. He divided the workers into groups which were to visit a certain number of villages and report back after a week. At the end of this period, 425 of the 600 villages had been examined. Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Collector confirming the claims of the cultivators, based on the results of the inquiry. The Collector responded by declaring Gandhiji's appeal to the Collector to stop the collection of the second instalment of the land revenue all to no avail.

At a large meeting of the cultivators at Nadiad on March 26th the first step for Satyagraha was taken. Some 200 cultivators took a pledge refusing to pay the land-revenue tax, even if they had to undergo suffering, until the injustice was removed. In the days that followed more and more people joined in the pledge. A statement was issued to the newspapers explaining the circumstances which gave rise to the movement and points of dissent.

Gandhiji's faith in the Kheda movement is expressed in a letter to his friend Pranjivandas Mehta :

"Whatever the final outcome of the struggle in Kaira, it is certain that both the public and the official world are given a very good training. An unprecedented awakening had come over the people. The very idea of non-payment of taxes was once unthinkable and considered an act of disloyalty. But now people have begun to put the idea into action freely and fearlessly.

"Those from the educated classes, who have become the volunteers, are benefited immensely. Towns people, who have never seen a village, got an opportunity to see 600 of them .. People have realised the truth of the principle, 'self-help is the best help'. There are two keynotes for success 'On you, not on others, depends your success' and 'No victory without voluntary self-suffering' "

A rumour spread in Karamsad that many people eagerly awaited the sale of Satyagrahis' lands by the Government. Gandhiji responded to this by declaring :

"Those who are waiting with evil intentions to buy land which is not theirs will not be able to hold that land... The Government cannot retain for any length of time land worth

thousands of rupees which it may choose to take over the recovery of a few rupees of land revenue. This is not an anarchichal country but a country where there is the rule of law. The moment I am satisfied that this Government is run deliberately in an anarchichal and arbitrary manner, I shall immediately become disloyal to it...."⁴

The irrepressible Mr. Pratt hit upon the idea that he himself could convince the people of Kheda to mend the error of their ways. He prevailed upon Gandhiji to help him organise a meeting. About two thousand farmers together with Vallabhbhai and other workers gathered to listen to what the Commissioner had to say. Speaking in Gujarati to the extent he knew, the tenet of Mr. Pratt's address was as follows: he advised the people to give up the obstinacy of refusing to pay the land revenue and though Gandhiji was a saint, he (Pratt) knew more about land management; the pledge had no value as proved by the fact that the textile in Ahmedabad had accepted an increase of 27 ½ % even though they had demanded 35%; the Government was the rescuer of the poor and it was his duty to save them; the Government was not angry — parents did not get annoyed at a child's kick; Mahatmaji may have had difficulty in understanding this as he had recently come from Africa but he (Pratt) had 28 years' experience of working in India.

Vallabhbhai interrupted to clarify the point regarding the "breaking of the pledge" in Ahmedabad. Mr. Pratt concluded by saying that he had said all he wanted to say; that a mendicant did not bother about losing his property — but they should remember that they were not all mendicants.

Although he tried to appear as amiable as possible, Mr. Pratt failed to conceal his official arrogance. The cultivators went to Gandhiji, who had not attended the meeting. He again explained the significance of the pledge — "It would be better if my throat is cut rather than give me a shock by breaking the pledge. Those who break the pledge are of no use to the country, to the Government or to God...."⁵

He was critical of Mr. Pratt's misrepresentation of the Ahmedabad strike, condemning it as a breach of courtesy, justice and friendship.

However, Gandhiji remained hopeful of a settlement. He asked for an interview with the Commissioner to which Mr. Pratt replied, "If you give up all your weapons and come to discuss, my doors are open to you but my hands are tied by legal and administrative rules."⁶

Gandhiji retorted, "I am a believer in Satyagraha. I would gladly give up my weapons and even my all for that matter, but I cannot give up my principles."⁷

The Kheda Satyagraha attracted the attention of intellectuals in Gujarat. Balwantrao Thakore, the eminent scholar, had raised questions about it. The publicity spread to Lokamanya Tilak from whom a resolution supporting the struggle of the cultivators was brought forward at public meeting in Bombay. Gandhiji issued detailed information, some of which is reproduced below.

"This fight is an unconscious but effective training to the people in their duty (*dharma*), in their moral behaviour, in unity, truth and non-violence. And the Government is taught the healthy lesson of listening to the people's voice. There is no room at all for hatred against anybody here...."⁸

"Here no effort undertaken is lost, no disaster befalls. Even a little of this righteous course delivers one from great fear."⁹

The Government next issued a long statement, declaring that the inquiry conducted by Gandhiji was inadequate and unsatisfactory and that the Collector had made most careful investigations. When Gandhiji returned from Delhi, he refuted every point in the statement and concluded that the Government had become obstinate, a position for which the Commissioner was mainly responsible.

Throughout the month of May the number of confiscations by the Government increased dramatically. However, in most cases, the forfeiture of land was cancelled and land revenue was recovered from the auction of movable property.

In spite of unceasing confiscations, the people remained firm and allowed their cattle, ornaments and utensils to be seized without opposition. Women took their full share of responsibility alongside of men. Their active participation in the campaign surprised representatives of Bombay newspapers who wrote expressing admiration for the courage of the entire peasantry. On one occasion even the Collector was moved enough to admit surprise at the remarkable determination of the people.¹⁰

Telegrams of sympathy poured in from all over the country.

On June 3rd, Gandhiji went to Uttarsanda in Nadiad Taluka. The Mamlatdar immediately went to see him and proposed that if those who were well-off paid their land revenue dues, recovery from the poor farmers would be postponed. Gandhiji requested that the proposal be put in writing. He then wrote to the collector to say that if an order to this effect were applied to the whole district and the payment of fines waived, then the struggle would cease. Gandhiji was of the opinion that this was a movement of principle and prestige and that its main objective was to get the revenue officials to admit that their orders cannot, must not be treated as unalterable. The Collector accepted Gandhiji's proposal and issued

orders accordingly. So on June 6th it was announced in a pamphlet, over the signatures of Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai that the fight was over.

The history of Kheda Satyagraha given above has been derived from the biography of Sardar Patel, written by Narahari Parikh. Parikh makes the following suggestions :

"It is possible that without replying to Gandhiji's this letter, the above orders and information may have been given to the Government of Bombay and Government of India, so that, officials may have been able to tell the Viceroy during the War Council that he continued Satyagraha in spite of our having issued orders as per his demands. . . . Or another possibility was that the Government of Bombay, on advice of the Viceroy, may have told the Commissioner and Collector to wind up the dispute at the time of emergency for the Empire. And it was often seem that the civil servants created innumerable difficulties in implementing the policies of the Viceroy or the Governor if they did not agree with them. And so the orders might have been to mislead the higher echelons and things might have been carried on as they were being carried on."¹⁰

Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai termed the end of the fight "graceless" because of this cheating.

This struggle made the people of Kheda more alert. They realised that a non-violent struggle could be carried on with courage and sacrifice. After this, the people of Kheda remained in the forefront of the country's fight for freedom.

Many people from Ahmedabad went to meet Gandhiji when he established the Ashram at Kochrab after his return from South Africa, but Vallabhbhai was not one of them. Years later he talked this to Pattabhi Sitaramaiya in the Ahmednagar Jail, when he said that he was closely observing at the time as to who was attracted towards Gandhiji ! He built a very high opinion about Gandhiji when he saw people like Kishorelal, Narahari, Mahadev, Swami Anand, joining Gandhiji, as he knew many of them. It is said that a man is known by the company he keeps, accordingly Vallabhbhai had tested Gandhiji. Initially in Kheda, Gandhiji wondered what type of a person would that stiff man be ? But ". . . the more I came to know him, the more I realized that I must secure his help. . . . If it were not for his assistance, I must admit that this campaign would not have been carried through so successfully."¹¹

It is necessary to note down an incident which occurred a couple of years later before ending this Chapter. The men whom Gandhiji had to face during his countless struggles were far-seeing

and clever men. They were not to be outdone easily. Commissioner, Mr. Pratt was one such clever man amongst the many Government officials who were facing Gandhiji in the Kheda struggle in the period March to June 1918. Mr. Pratt wrote to Gandhiji from England, where he was on holiday, a year and a half after the end of Kheda struggle, when Gandhiji expressed his trust in the British Government during Amritsar Congress. This letter indicates his change of heart about Gandhiji and is also a proof of the effect of Satyagraha on an opponent :

"Dear Mr. Gandhi,

During my absence from India, I have been in fairly close touch with Indian affairs through the newspapers, both English and Indian and a week or two ago when I read the account of your speech in the Amritsar Congress, in which you and Mr. Jinnah were fighting the battle of trust and co-operation against suspicion and disappointment, I felt that I would like to write and congratulate you on the stand you took. I write this purely as a private individual. Our relations in the past have not been altogether harmonious. Speaking for myself only, I feel sure that there have been hard thoughts and hard words against you, which were not justified. But the future matters for more than the past, and I wish to grasp the hand of fellowship and co-operation, in the same spirit in which you extended it in your admirable speech. I hope, though I cannot be sure, that I will return to Ahmedabad at the end of March, and I look forward to the pleasure of meeting you in India.

Yours sincerely,

F. Pratt."¹²

Mahadev was almost all the time with Gandhiji during this historical incident. He used to note down in his diary whatever Gandhiji said and that is the reason why we have the copies of Gandhiji's letters and notes about his lectures. Moreover he used to defuse his natural amiability by participating in the talks between Gandhiji and other workers.

Kheda Satyagraha took place only a few months after Mahadev joined Gandhiji. Thus it was only the beginning of Mahadev losing himself in Gandhi. Mahadev used to write in his diary the virtues he perceived in Gandhiji, and discussed when possible the things he did not understand. His pen captured many points which might have seemed unimportant, such as that Barrister Vallabhbhai was not comfortable when sleeping on the platform of Vasad station, whereas Gandhiji slept soundly, the moment he lay down; Gandhiji took a nap during a rough journey in a bullock-cart, from Mehemdavad to Navagam when other travellers could barely keep sitting. The good-

will that was fostered between Mahadev and Vallabhbhai during this period continued to grow and remained until Mahadev's death. Vallabhbhai kept on remembering Mahadev even after his death. G. M. Nandurkar, Editor of *Vallabhbhai's Letters* says about the relationship between Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and Mahadev, "One feels after reading the letters that destiny itself arranged the merging of these three like the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and hidden Saraswati."¹³

Mahadev mentions in his diary about Gandhiji's ways of attracting workers thus :

"In loving admiration for Bapuji, I gave him the epithet 'The hunter' in my talks with Pandyaji. He goes on, I explained, catching someone or other, and yokes him to the national work, a passion of his life, which he pursues day and night. No one could help getting tired of dilating upon his 'Lila', the divine play of the Lord, and stopping the description by saying 'neti', 'neti', — I remarked. I then gave him some instances of his varied ways of capturing the quarry for his work : He won me over by pointing out how very fast I wrote, and yet in what charming hand, . . . Then, the other day, he made Durga (Mahadev's wife) fall for him, by establishing a father's relationship with her, and creating in her a sense of deep gratefulness through an exceedingly loving letter. His charming chats with Ansuyaben and Shankarlal Banker, another labour Leader, and his unfailing invitation on meeting them, to have their meals with him, captured them too, and they became his colleagues. Then one day, he pressed Vallabhbhai . . . to dine with him everyday in the morning also, and heartily appreciated his refusal to remarry, though his wife had died 12 years earlier and thus drew him into the orbit of his magnetic field. There was another way with him, besides, I added, and that was to share his most confidential secrets with some of us."¹⁴

Although hardly six months had elapsed since joining Gandhiji, Mahadev commenced close inspection of Gandhiji :

"As I am writing a commentary on his book *Sarvodaya*, I said, 'There are some chapters in it which are really excellent in style and substance, but there are some others which appear slipshod.' He readily accepted my criticism and observed, 'Sometimes I used to have an itch to write and the output was really charming. But sometimes when, on my return home thoroughly fagged out after a whole day's honest work, somebody demanded from me a definite number of columns for the *Indian Opinion*, I would dictate to him, and even say that I

did not approve of such and such sentences, but that it could not be helped, as I had no time to think out a better expression. It is quite possible that such parts fall flat."¹⁵

Mahadev had a tremendous capacity to imbibe the best from the atmosphere around him and develop his personality. He reflected on the importance of observing the pledge when Gandhiji explained it to the Kheda farmers.

"The words, 'One who has not taken the pledge knocks from place to place like a rudderless ship and ultimately perishes' have given me too an admonition."¹⁶

Gandhiji had developed a confidence in Mahadev in that short period. Once in Ahmedabad during a talk regarding Kheda, he addressed Mahadev and said, "There is a new spirit in the air. The people here have now come to think that, in matters of public interest, they ought to be able to do without English Assistance. And you will agree that upto a point they are right. When we got your telegram yesterday, I opened it before many of my friends, and I suggested to them we might have you to help us. I thought that when you came I should be free to go to Delhi for the Ali brothers' internment question, and from my having to go to Delhi, it struck me that you might take up either the Kaira question or the internment question."¹⁷

Thus we see that Gandhiji was ready to hand over any of the problems that were important to Mahadev. Later on in a very short time Mahadev also became proficient enough to take up some items independently. He did not lack confidence, but his humility made him sit at Gandhiji's feet.

On the subject of Gandhiji's confidence in him, Mahadev wrote in his Diary, "When once Bapu begins to praise a man, because he appreciates him, he does not stint in pouring out all his love and regard for him. He does not then care to see whether that man really deserves all that love and esteem." Mahadev continues, "In the eye of the lover, the loved one appears to be a paragon of virtue, though, in fact, he may be a contemptible creature. But may not this practice of Bapu harm the man himself? And when such exaggerated remarks are made before a large crowd some of them feel embarrassed...."¹⁸

Once, "as he was chatting with Deenbandhu C. F. Andrews and I came up to serve tea to the guest, he smothered me with 'Mahadev is over-flowing with love for you Andrews'. I do not think I shall spoil him by praising him in his presence. If I say that he has simply filled the Ashram, he has come not to be blessed by the Ashram but to bless it. I am ashamed when I have to say this, but it is true that there are some men who have come to bless the

Ashram and not to be blessed by it. He is one of the few pearls I have got here.' ¹⁸

Regarding this Mahadev has written only a few words, "He smothered me with his praises."

But the fact that Gandhiji was very happy with Mahadev's work did not mean that he was less strict with him about it. The first part of the Diary of 26th April is an instance :

"He showered his love on me, and gave me a parting embrace, before he retired last night. But the first thing he did in morning, was to call me and give me lecture 'What shall I say, when you did it all out of love? But I must say that spiritually you have erred. Why did you not take your meal the other day till I came back? I was deeply pained to find you waiting for me. If you desisted from having your meal out of feeling of love for me, let me tell you that, that love was mistaken love. If you wanted to have the joy of my company at dinner, it was simply self-indulgence.' ¹⁹

"It would have been terrible had he stopped there. How awful it was for Bapu to say that Mahadev's waiting for Bapu's return from some place away from the Ashram for taking food as a 'spiritual wrong' and a 'matter of self-indulgence' ! A question arises as to whether this can be called oppression or not ! But the next sentence in the Diary brings it down from the ethical to the practical consideration, which makes Gandhiji's point slightly more bearable to Mahadev and understandable to us, 'I wanted to send you somewhere immediately on my return, but I saw that you had not had your meal, and was forced to give up the idea. How can I take work from you this way? You are prone to mistaking your bad habits for good ones. Are not our relations too close now for standing on any such formality? Your father and Durga have joined in pampering you rather too much.' ¹⁹

Gandhiji's personality portrayed a confluence of the east and the west. An echo of the eastern culture was evident in his ideal, his aim and to some extent in his language, while in his competence in work, his staunch way of getting work done and in his personal habits the effect of the western way of life was evident. Due to this he appears to be ready to hurt Mahadev's softer emotions.

Mahadev's devotion gave him the strength to withstand this attack of a mighty force against a humble being. Of course, it cannot be said that there never was a misunderstanding ! Gandhiji sent Mahadev once again to Champaran from Sabarmati. He kept Narahari on the Ashram for the Rashtriya Shala work. Mahadev got the impression that Gandhiji had found him inadequate and so was

sending him away. It was Gandhiji's turn to feel hurt when he came to know about this. Mahadev complained about this in a letter sent to Kheda through Vallabhbhai. Gandhiji sent the reply too through Vallabhbhai.

"Bhaishri Mahadev,

I never dreamt that you would misinterpret my proposal and consider as a vote of censure against you what I had said solely out of my deep faith and confidence in you. You are so entwined around me that I did anticipate that it would be a wrench and shock to you to have to go away to Champaran. But it passes my comprehension how you could even imagine that in making that proposal I played a trick on you because I considered you unfit for the work here and wanted to get rid of you. On the contrary, I thought of you for the work there, as I had considered you the only fit person who could fulfil all my hopes. I also believed that the work which Durga would be expected to do there was not beyond her capacity. Perhaps it was an overestimate but that was my view. Now let me hasten to tell you that all your fears about my estimate of your worth are entirely imaginary and baseless. Far from it, it was my high esteem for the abilities of both of you that was at the back of my suggestion of sending you there. I had already spoken to Ravjibhai and Devdas of the inconvenience I would have to suffer owing to the consequent lack of your assistance. You have established your position here so well that you have become almost irreplaceable. There was no exaggeration but simple truth in what I wrote to Polak about you. I have chosen you for my colleague because I found in you just the right man for my political work, and for your efficiency in other matters and for your character. You have not disappointed me at all. And what is more the fact that you prepare *khichri*, rice and lentil cooked together for me with such immense love! . . ."²⁰

Next night Gandhiji arrived at Ahmedabad. Mahadev wrote:

"I received a chastening sermon for my foolish letter . . . next day. 'I had never imagined that you would misunderstand me so woefully. You have done me a grave injustice.' Presenting his own image Gandhiji continued, 'You have condemned me, a person reputed to be the bravest in India, as a coward. Could I not have told you plainly, what you imagined I let you know in a roundabout crooked way?' You couldn't see the simple fact that I had prepared myself to undergo the sacrifice which your absence would entail on me. I was quite certain that you would succeed at any place where I sent you and in any kind of work I entrusted you with. I had suggested

your name under the belief that you possessed that all-round fitness. Your letter only proved that you did not.'

" 'When you said that Narahari couldn't be spared but I could be,' I faltered, 'I felt I was hardly needed here.'

"*Bapu* 'That's true. The Ashram School needs Narahari. How could he be sent away? And for me, it is not quite impossible to do without a Secretary. I would certainly be inconvenienced, but I might carry on. No other person could be your substitute in the amount and quality of your output, but as I am not unaccustomed to do my work single-handed, your absence would not bring it to a standstill. Only with you to help me, I could put in double work and that sacrifice I had made myself ready to undergo.'"²¹

Mahadev must have felt embarrassed. Similar incidents that were emotionally painful were to occur in the future because of his sensitive nature.

FOOTNOTES.

1. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. 1, p. 59
2. Ibid. 60
3. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, p. 39
4. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. 1, p. 74
5. *CWMG*, 14, p. 278
6. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. 1, p. 82
7. Ibid.
8. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, p. 91
9. M. D., *The Gita According to Gandhi*, Discourse, II, Verse 40, p. 158
10. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. 1, p. 86
- 10a. Ibid. p. 86
11. Ibid. p. 89
12. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, pp. 54-55
13. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-Patro*, Vol. 4, p. 28 (Guj.)
14. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, pp. 34-35
15. Ibid. p. 35
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid. p. 72
18. Ibid. pp. 71-72
19. Ibid. p. 103
20. Ibid. p. 124
21. Ibid. p. 125

CHAPTER XV

RECRUITMENT

This Chapter deals with a period in Gandhiji's life about which there had been a lot of misunderstanding which persists even to-day. It would be interesting to note Mahadev's viewpoint in this matter

This was the period of recruitment to the Army. Those were the critical days during the First World War. The British Officials were trying to get as much help as possible from India as a part of the British Empire.

When Gandhiji was invited to the War Council called by the Viceroy he was busy in the Kheda Struggle. He did go to Delhi honouring the Viceroy's invitation, but he was feeling uneasy attending a Council where leaders such as Lokamanya Tilak and Annie Besant were not invited. Moreover, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali were in detention, and their absence was also going to be felt. So he went to Delhi with the intention of meeting the Viceroy personally, registering his protest at those leaders' absence and returning. But he softened when the Viceroy talked to him very cordially and expressed his helplessness. He not only attended the Council but supported the resolution to help in the war effort with one sentence in Hindi. To use his own words, 'his martial attitude won over his sense of justice' after his meeting with the Viceroy and so he attended the Conference. After the Conference, Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Viceroy. Here are some excerpts from it :

"I recognise that in the hour of its danger we must give — as we have decided to give — ungrudging and unequivocal support to the Empire. . .

. . . We can but accelerate our journey towards the goal, Home Rule by silently and simply devoting ourselves, heart and soul, to the work of delivering the Empire from the threatening danger . . . We must perceive that, if we serve to save the Empire, we have in that very act secured Home Rule. . . . We

are today outside the Partnership. Ours is a consecration based on the hope of better future . . . You have appealed to us to sink domestic differences. If the appeal involves the toleration of tyranny and wrong doing on the part of officials, I am powerless to respond. I shall resist tyranny to the uttermost. . . If I can popularise the use of soul-force . . . love-force, in the place of brute-force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to do its worst. . . .

"I write this because I love the English Nation, and I wish to evoke in every Indian the loyalty of the Englishmen."¹

After this Gandhiji has written many letters describing the reasons for participating in recruitment. Mahadev kept the copies of these in his Diaries. As a gist of all these letters Narahari has quoted some parts in the Preface to the First Part of *Day to Day with Gandhi*. Almost that entire portion of the Preface is quoted here as it would be very useful to understand Gandhiji's ideal about the subject.

"A Nation that is unfit to fight cannot from experience prove the virtue of not fighting. I do not infer from this that India must fight, but I do say that India must know how to fight.

"I have not come across a single individual in India who follows in practice the creed of non-violence as faithfully as I. He who does not know how to die without killing must learn the art by knowing first how to kill and face death.

"When I gave my name as a recruit in the army I have said I should kill neither friend nor foe. Regarding those who want to fight but will not — either out of cowardice or spite against the British — what is my duty? Must I not say, 'If you can follow my path so much the better, but if you cannot you ought to give up cowardice or spite and fight'? You cannot teach Ahimsa to a man who cannot kill."²

"I shall best spread the gospel of Ahimsa or Satyagraha by asking the *himsak*, militant men to work out their *himsa* in the least offensive manner; and may succeed, in the very act, in making them to realize the better worth of Ahimsa

'Ahimsa is the eradication of the desire to injure or to kill. Ahimsa can be practised only towards those that are inferior to you in every way. It follows, therefore, that to become a full Ahimsaist you have to attain absolute perfection. Must we all then try to become Sandows before we can love perfectly? This seems to be unnecessary. It is enough if we can face the world without flinching. It is personal courage that is an

absolute necessity and some will acquire that courage only after they have been trained.

"There has been compulsory renunciation of arms but not the desire to kill. . . . All that can be said of India is that individuals have made serious attempts with greater success than elsewhere to popularise the doctrine. But there is no warrant for the belief that it has taken deep root among the people.

". . . Full development of body-force is a *sine qua non* of full appreciation and assimilation of Ahimsa

"I must wait for instilling into any mind the doctrine of Ahimsa, i.e. perfect love, when it has grown to maturity by having its full play through a vigorous body."³

After pronouncing these 'dicta', he presents the difficulties arising in his way :

"My difficulty now arises in the practical application of the idea. What is the meaning of having a vigorous body ? How far should India have to go for a training in arms-bearing ? Must every individual go through the practice or is it enough that a free atmosphere is created and the people without having to bear arms, etc., imbibe the necessary personal courage from the surroundings ? I believe that the last is the correct view."⁴

Then he explained how he wanted to use war to strengthen his principle :

"And, therefore, I am absolutely right, as things are, in calling upon every Indian to join the army, telling him at the same time that he needs doing so not for the lust of blood, but for the sake of learning not to fear death.

"There is not a single recruiting speech in which I have not laid the greatest stress upon the part of a warrior's duty. There is no speech in which I have yet said, 'let us go to kill the Germans'. My refrain is 'let us go and die for the sake of India and the Empire'."

Gandhiji puts forward two possible results of India's responding to this call : India's involvement causing England to win the war and thus earning the right to dictate a lasting peace or trenches full of fearless men whose love for their fellow men would cause the Germans to lay down their arms

"So it comes to this, that under exceptional circumstances war is a necessary evil, even as the body is. If the motive is right, it may be turned to the profit of mankind and that an Ahimsaist may not stand aside and look on with indifference, but must make the choice and actively co-operate or actively resist "⁵

Narahari is not satisfied even after giving so many quotations, and so he said, "It cannot be said that these quotations or even all the letter appearing in the diary completely reveal the working of Bapu's mind on these two points." It was clear that Gandhiji's premise in this matter was that of a man who is searching. He was not presenting either to the Viceroy or to the world a realised truth. In those days he was loyal to the British Empire. And even when he rebelled against it, his love for the English people remained the same. He said that those who were ready to take up arms should participate actively in the war. His loyalty to Britain had a special meaning and so was restrictive. He said, "I am clinging on to England because India can give its message to the world in a better way through England." And yet he had earlier criticised its policy. "I heartily detest England's step of disarming India, its arrogant and exclusive military policy and the sacrifice of Indian wealth and art at the altar of England's greed in trade." This paradox caused some controversy.

Mahadev did not have Gandhiji's loyalty towards the British or it might be more appropriate to state that he probably did not think too deeply on the matter, neither did he possess Gandhiji's experience, about them.

Mahadev's role at the time was double-sided. To understand Gandhiji's stand on every subject and to accept it with faith. And so he had not put forth many arguments about this subject and had merely noted down whatever Gandhiji said about recruitment. Under the same role he was ready to take any type of training suggested by Gandhiji. The next point was that he wanted to cultivate devotion without finding faults. He had accepted the role of a disciple the moment he joined Gandhiji. He thus avoided finding faults to maintain that role. His attitude was to seek out his own limitations whenever he had reservation about Gandhiji's behaviour. He wanted to believe that there must be something beyond his understanding, that there must be a positive aspect which he could not see because of his own limitations and that he would understand that aspect better if he could find out his own limitations.

Gandhiji of course did not encourage this attitude. He was happy when any of his colleagues criticised him and he welcomed such criticism. He certainly did not always agree with it, he even used to counter argue and such discussions left a positive effect on both the parties.

Mahadev took some time to voice his difference of opinion with Gandhiji. We will notice such expression of differences in later Chapters. In doing so he naturally grasped Gandhiji's point of view and felt one with him. This was the result of Mahadev's devotion

sans logic, on one hand, and his humility on the other, which was also a part of his devotion. Thus, his humility made him try to find fault with himself rather than with Gandhiji when a difference of opinion arose.

Because of this he did not voice his difference with Gandhiji in the matter of recruitment. When Gandhiji made some point, without agruing he merely used to ask, "Have you put this point of view clearly before the country?"

Mahadev had been with Gandhiji only for six or seven months when the latter started his campaign for recruitment. His wish at the time was to take in the essence of Gandhiji's thoughts, not to analyse them. The role was that of a virtuous devotee and not that of a man of learning.

Thus when names were to be registered for recruitment, Gandhiji started the list with his own name, but all those following were the Ashramites. Needless to say that Mahadev's name was among the first few. These Ashramites had also decided, along with Gandhiji, not to take up arms. They were ready to die in the war; ready to nurse the wounded; and were ready to help in any other way, barring taking up arms.

It was also clear that Gandhiji's role was unlike that of the pacifists of Europe — total opposition to war. The attitude of nationalism was bound to surface in that of a leader of a slave country fighting for independence. No doubt, his nationalism was neither narrow, nor militant, to lead him to attack other countries; but that Nationalism inspired him to stand up to an attack on his country in spite of having no arms. He had experience of nursing soldiers during war in South Africa. He started training his colleagues along similiar lines. Prabhudas Gandhi, a young man, who had joined Gandhiji's entourage for a few days in Kheda District, has given a vivid description of the training :

"Gandhiji was totally bed-ridden. His sickness was persisting. Physically he had become very weak. But his thinking had not lessened. One late afternoon, Bapu said in a very low voice to Mahadev who was near him, 'Just now our quota of recruitment has stopped. The days are passing. I am bed-ridden. But you must take advantage of this time and train your body for recruitment, wherein you have to learn how to march. For that you must have a strong body. You must develop a capacity, from now on, to walk long distances. You must walk for a long distance daily after the morning prayers, so that you will cultivate a habit for it.'

Mahadev heard Bapu's suggestion without any argument. And the very next day went for a walk in the dark immediately

after the early morning prayers. He returned long after sunrise to Bapu in the *Anathashram*.

Bapuji questioned Mahadev, as to the distance he covered, and was totally dissatisfied when he was informed that he, Mahadev, went out early and walked about seven to eight miles. He ordered Mahadev unequivocally 'Daily you must cover 28 miles 20 in the morning and eight in the evening.'

Like a real soldier, Mahadev quietly accepted Bapuji's order to walk 28 miles daily.

The day after this talk, Mahadev took me along with him when he commenced his walk.

We started walking at a medium pace, keeping track of the mile-stones, on the road from Nadiad to Mehemdabad. Mahadev walked with long strides as he was quite tall, but took care not to leave me behind. To fully utilise the morning, he started explaining the wide ramifications of the Gujarati language.

He thought of many Gujarati proverbs and explained their meaning. He explained the beauty of the same word being used in different ways with different meanings. He would narrate countless words expressing similar meaning in a light manner which made the walk interesting and easy.

After four miles he told me to wait there under a shady tree till his return after a twelve mile walk, when both of us would return to the Ashram together.

We would start for our walk before five in the morning and return to the Ashram before 10 o'clock. Without waiting for a moment he would start his daily routine of taking his bath at the well, and climb the stairs with a bucket full of water. In the evening he would once again go for a long walk and cover eight miles during his walk. Thus he started following Bapu's order verbatim.

After some days of this regular twenty-eight mile walk daily, one evening Bapu said after the prayers 'Mahadev it becomes dark when you return from your walk in the evening. It is the hot season. Because of the heat, snakes come out on the road from the fields. If by mistake we would trample a snake, the consequence would be serious. We would welcome death, if necessary, but it is not sensible to risk life unnecessarily. Hence forward discontinue your evening walks.' "7

It may be said that the effort for recruitment was one of the most unsuccessful endeavours of Gandhiji in India. In spite of ceaseless effort he could not get a single recruit apart from the

Ashram inmates. He had complained that he did not get one person who opposed recruitment on account of his objection to killing. And so he came to the conclusion that people did not want to be recruited because of mere cowardice. Gandhiji expressed pain and censure for the cowardice of the people of Gujarat. It could have been that recruits were no longer required in the great war when the tempo for recruitment increased, and so that programme had to be abandoned. However, it was indeed a fact that in the very Kheda District, where only a month ago, people used to flock on their own in thousands to hear Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai they had to be persuaded to attend meetings for recruitment. Gandhiji accepted this situation as reality. He wrote to his youngest son, Devadas, whom he had sent to Tamil Nadu to propagate Hindi :

"My failure so far suggests that people are not ready to follow my advice. They are ready, however, to accept my services in a cause which suits them. This is as it should be."⁸

Recruitment was the most difficult of all activities undertaken so far. Many youngsters have been known to withdraw from unsuccessful movements. But Mahadev, full of devotion, was the least affected by these ups and downs. He was as much Gandhiji's colleague in this unsuccessful campaign as he was during the successful ones. For this mental balance, an inner strength is required, which he had in abundance. That inner balance gave him the strength to accept external success or failure. People in many villages assured him that preparations had been made for Gandhiji's programme. Yet when he went to the place, he had to sweep the floor, arrange for seating and also make the announcements to get the people to attend the meeting. This did not bother him. A colloquial term for 'everything is ready', used in the Kheda District, became a joke for him and remained with him through life.

Mahadev developed his capacity to go on writing even in the midst of an unbearable din, only after his Kheda tour. He had a fairly good control over his sleep, though later on this was adversely affected due to his high blood-pressure; in those days he could sleep and get up at will, even amongst noise and shouting of slogans. The training for this also began in Kheda.

Durgaben also came to Nadiad for the last two months in Bapuji's camp. She took up the responsibility of cooking. In the beginning before Durgaben's arrival it often fell to Mahadev's lot to prepare *khichri*, which he did with love.

Durgaben had to go through a lot of penance before she got the permission to join Mahadev at Sabarmati from Champaran. She wrote a letter to Gandhiji from Madhuvan in Champaran, where she worked and was known as *pandit*. The letter reminds one of *sati* of

the Puranas who was Lord Siva's beloved. A major portion of the letter is reproduced here to give a glimpse of Mahadev and Durgaben's family life.

"I had hoped that you would directly come here from Indore. But my hope ended in despair. Please forgive me if I write something which I should not, in this letter.

"In a previous letter I had written to you that now I am used to separation; but at that time I thought you both would come over here in a short time. Now, I must write to you as my hope has proved useless that I was never very brave and I had suppressed my feelings then. But now my feelings cannot be suppressed. . .

"I cannot bear my own condition. Here I do not have any challenging work either, and my wishes are also very modest. I have only desired to spend my ordinary life peacefully.

"I am really content that Mahadevprasad is staying with you and serving you. I feel a hundred times more unhappy, if I interfere in his service by my suggestion or if I make him unhappy. But I would like to have a share in his service to you. When I came here, I had hopes to be always with him and allowed him to join you when I saw his eagerness to do so. But now I cannot tolerate my condition.

"Will you not accede to my humble request? I am asking for something as a right which you gave me when you made me your daughter!

"Would you not allow me to take care of the cooking, washing clothes and other things, while he serves you?

"Ba is not with you. She is also in a dilemma like myself. I feel very bad whilst writing all this. But what can I do? I cannot suppress my emotions. Can I not recompense you for my travel expenses by my haphazard service to you?

"I am continuously thinking about Mahadevprasad. His attention is more or less fixed on intellectual activities for his development. It is difficult for him to handle small matters. And he feels upset when he fails to handle them. I know all this. I remember that at our home, I or my mother-in-law had to remind him of the smallest matter, and I feel hurt that I am not able to do these things and make it easy for him to serve you. To my mind his service to you is also important.

"I am ready to put up with all hardships which may arise when I stay and move around with you. But I cannot stay alone. I do not possess this strength. Won't you consider this?

"I am thinking of the total emptiness I would encounter when Anandiben goes away in the month of May. I am not so

much engrossed in the service to the people that I can forget things dear to me. And so I would request you to relieve me from this situation. I would prefer to serve my old and unhappy mother at my own house, rather than do what I am doing to-day.

"This is one added trouble in your many activities. But what can I do? I cannot but write to you ' I also want to add one more thing I had received a letter from my home, written by my father-in-law I gathered from it that he has not liked our present situation His letter shows that although he had given his consent for us to come to you, it was a half-hearted one. So I would like to tell you that I do not want to be a hindrance in Mahadevprasad's desire to remain in your service But I also do not want to hurt my father I do wish that we would be of service to him whenever he needs us, and I cannot take a pledge that I will remain life-long with you Nevertheless, I am ready to stay with you till we can do so

"I request you to forgive me for this letter written in sadness. . . I also ask forgiveness for troubling you to read this letter. But why should I feel ashamed to open my heart to one who has accepted me as a daughter?"

Naturally both Mahadev and Gandhiji felt a sense of relief when Durgaben joined them at Nadiad

Gandhiji was run down physically because of the effort in recruitment and by ceaseless toil He contracted severe dysentery which persisted for a long time ' The body became so frail and weak for some days that it appeared as if he was hanging between life and death Mahadev who could bear pain himself, could not bear to see someone else suffer ' More so, when it was Gandhiji who suffered. Mahadev's worry was beyond description Night and day he was attentive He would answer letters while Gandhiji slept. The number of letters to be written had also doubled - they were his own and Gandhiji's.

Gandhiji believed every illness to be man made How could he forgive himself if it was his own illness? He firmly believed that this sickness was due to irregular eating and wandering And so he was trying to treat it through his own remedies

Mahadev could not tolerate Gandhiji's pain due to dysentery when he went for toilet He asked that a commode be brought from the Ashram Narahari came by the return train with the commode. Narahari had been engrossed in the work of Rashtriya Shala and so had not left the Ashram even to witness Satyagraha at Kheda or to be with Gandhiji when he went to his own village Kathlal On seeing him Gandhiji asked, "What brings you here?" "I have brought the

commode," Narahari replied simply. "Who asked for the commode?" asked Gandhiji. Mahadev tried to reason with him that he was having difficulty in passing stool and the commode was anyway lying unused in the Ashram. Gandhiji was very angry with him. "How can we ask for a commode meant for the Ashram?" Mahadev tried to argue that no one was using it there. This irritated Gandhiji more. He said, "Just as the buckets, water or sand is kept on the railway station to put out a fire, which is not used daily, in the same way the commode in the Ashram can be used by someone any time." Vallabhbhai intervened when he saw Gandhiji scolding Mahadev and Narahari. He said, "Why are you scolding these boys? You may be used to a commode because of your stay in South Africa! No one else has that habit in the Ashram. Even if someone was suffering from diarrhoea, he would like to use the ordinary toilet."

Gandhiji became quiet on Vallabhbhai's intervention. Nevertheless, he suggested that the commode may be returned that very night. Vallabhbhai stopped Narahari from returning that night and sent him back in the morning.

Thus although Mahadev was ever attentive night and day, he never knew when his master would burst forth in righteous indignation.

FOOTNOTES :

1. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 14, pp 377-80 (Selected)
2. M. D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, pp. ix-x
3. *Ibid.* p. x
4. *Ibid.* p. xi
5. *Ibid.* Preface, p. xi (Selected)
6. *Ibid.* Preface, p. xii
7. *Shukratarak Sama*, pp. 79-80
8. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 14, p. 480
9. From the Correspondence of Gandhi Memorial Library

CHAPTER XVI

INITIATION

Mahadev joined Gandhiji in November 1917. He went to jail in December 1921 for the first time. This period was the period of his initiation. He was cognizant of many things before he came to Gandhiji. But he grasped many more immediately on joining him and a certain type of penance continued till his last breath.

He cultivated unparalleled oneness with Gandhiji during this period of initiation. A type of internal and external discipline more internal than external — was necessary to achieve this. Mahadev was a natural introvert and so the internal discipline came easily to him. His external discipline followed his inner discipline.

Rabindranath has coined a word — *Aguner Parasmani*, a magic touch-stone of fire. He has sung :

Touch my soul
With the touch-stone of fire.
May its flame
Chasten this life of mine.

And then says —
And hold it a loft
Like a lamp
Burning in your temple.

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

It was as if Mahadev came to Gandhiji, fully prepared for the touch of the fiery touch-stone, and so the most difficult things became less difficult. These things were those such as, running about doing public work; toiling for hours together; hardships of ascetic life; separation from the wife. These were on the external side. And constant internal vigilance; self-analysis and search; identifying one's own fault; readiness to accept them as such and an effort to remove them were some on the internal side. All these became if not easy — less difficult for him. It was his immense devotion that made his penance easy.

When a young man leaves legal practice or a job after education and takes to social service, ordinary people call it renunciation. But Mahadev had said :

"To be frank, there is nothing like renunciation in this world. One who renounces a thing or a pleasure with full understanding, does it to gain something better. He has developed a dislike or indifference towards the former and has developed a desire for something more attractive than the latter. This is the secret behind the great truth. 'Sacrifice does not last without indifference.' "

Mahadev was not much enamoured of the life he led, right after his studies till he joined Gandhiji. His attractions towards worldly pleasures seemed to be rather less than that of people in general. His readiness to stay away from his wife for long period due to studies or service, no lack of the prudence to drive away another's wife from his bed; no desire for big financial gains; lack of intention to live beyond his modest financial means to satisfy his food-habits or pleasure — all these indicated that Mahadev was not very fond of worldly pleasures. On the other hand, his intense attachment was to something noble. Religious upbringing in childhood, circumstances and attitude as well as a study of literature and philosophy in his youth nurtured propriety and morality in him. In Gandhiji, he found solid receptivity for his attachment and devotion. This receptivity was not an inanimate object but part of an ever progressive character. And so Mahadev's development and Gandhiji's progress were simultaneous. Conflicts did arise due to differences in their natures, but there was more of diversity than conflict.

The essence of this concord was love — which started from attraction and gradually increasing, resulted in 'oneness'. The difference in nature of both of them brought about quick offence, anger and remorse, discontent and reconciliation on many occasions as a result of that very love. During the years of initiation, Mahadev had experienced many ups and downs on the swing of his love for Gandhiji.

Many incidents of give and take occurred between the master and the disciple once they started to live together. Mahadev, who had seldom cooked, had to learn how to prepare a meal. At times Gandhiji found Mahadev's tears mixing with that food. And so he became a teacher and taught Mahadev how to cook, and could say later that one of the advantages of Mahadev's presence was his *khichri* cooked with love.

An unprecedented relationship had begun, which lasted till the last breath of Mahadev and the last day of Gandhiji's memory.

Gandhiji had taken almost a complete control of Mahadev's mind just as Mahadev had done with Gandhiji's work. It began with companionship. After the Political Conference at Godhra Mohan and Mahadev travelled together going to Champaran. Thereafter imprisonment, Mahadev's sickness or when Mahadev had to go elsewhere on duty, were the only occasions for being away from each other. Otherwise, both of them lived as if there was one soul in two bodies.

Mahadev not only looked after Gandhiji's office work, but also took over the personal and domestic work. All this he did so naturally that Gandhiji also did not at all feel reluctant to hand over the work to him. After Mahadev's death, when Dr. Sushila Nayar started washing his clothes, he remembered Mahadev continuously. "Mahadev used to do all these jobs. The difference was, that in those days I used to wear many more clothes than I do to-day and they were quite thick and heavy." Again he would explain his principle and console himself, "The glory that Mahadev achieved in important assignments was the result of the training in the initial years of doing the small jobs."

Gandhiji never considered these 'small jobs' as trivial. He used to perform every task with the same care and insisted that others also did likewise. He was interested in what was cooked and how it was cooked, in how to spread and wind up a bed, in the amount of water and firewood used, in using one side of a paper if unused; in noticing the propriety or otherwise of addressing a correspondent in a letter; in finding out the time of postal clearance when going to a new place and then checking whether the letters were posted in time. Mahadev was interested in learning all these things quickly, taking over the burden and relieving Gandhiji's worry. In allotting such work and getting it done, Gandhiji practised an amazing mixture of stiffness and affection. Here is an instance from Mahadev's diary :

"When Bapu got into the train, he asked me, 'Have you got the water tank filled?' That idea had not struck me. 'Must I have to remind you of even such small things? You ought to anticipate our travelling needs . . . Whenever I get out of the train, you must see to it that our needs for the onward journey are provided for. This is the first lesson you must learn.' "

The repeated emphatic tone in the above quotation indicated how exacting Gandhiji could be.

On the other hand care for a colleague was equally important. Gandhiji wrote in a letter on 1st April 1919 to a Danish lady, Esther Faering :

"I was so sorry I did not see you at the station. I felt keenly for you and poor Mahadev. Both of you are sensitive,

almost cast in the same mould I was shuddering as I looked through the window when the train steamed out. I felt that he would run so madly to catch the train that he might drop down from sheer exhaustion. I was glad to see him at Bezwada."²

This affectionate relationship became very close in a very short time. So much so that it was difficult for both of them to stay away from each other even for a few days. Gandhiji was going to Patna leaving Mahadev at Allahabad only for a day. Mahadev noted down that he felt like crying when he went to see off Bapu. Gandhiji once wrote in a letter: "A law seems to have been framed in Matheran that if I do not write, you also cannot."³ Or another time he wrote: "I received your letter. Whether I have free time or not I like to eat my meal and in the same way I like some letters. I would find time to read those letters just as I would find time to eat."⁴

Mahadev never faltered in personal service to Gandhiji. And Gandhiji at times would find Mahadev sleeping on the terrace, would wake him and see that he slept in his own bed. There was a difference of a generation in their ages. Their temperaments also differed considerably. At times Mahadev's love bordered on sentimentalism. When Gandhiji paid attention, talked, wrote a letter, he would pour out his heart in a few sentences, but his love would not contain sentimentality. Once Mahadev was at Allahabad when Gandhiji was touring Assam. It was Gandhiji who had sent him there, but almost daily Gandhiji remembered him during his tour. He wrote on the way to Silchar:

"We thought of you during our voyage on the Brahmaputra. But do we always get, and can we always eat, the food we relish?"⁵

He wrote from Tezpur:

"If you had been with me in Assam, your gift for poetry would have got sufficient food. But we are not born for enjoyment in this land of duty. We have, therefore, to draw that poetry we can from Assam and Prayag both."⁶

Thus it is clear that the dividing line was very thin between Gandhiji's life and training. It was Gandhiji's life which enabled him to train thousands of workers during his life time. His life was the inspiration to the workers. The main essence was his love. A love which supported the workers during crisis and which made even a scolding, pleasantly bearable.

* * *

The training which Gandhiji gave to Mahadev during this 'period of initiation' contained things that he did not know, the things that might be considered negligible, but the main bent of the training was the help to develop the inner self.

The first point in the training of his innerself was to enable him to understand himself. Gandhiji never got tired of analysing Mahadev's innermost feelings. He had complained with anxiety about Mahadev to Esther Faering in January 1920.

"You may share this letter with Mahadev if you wish to. . . Early this morning I wanted to send you a word of cheer. I feel for poor Mahadev just the same. He has an unequal burden to carry and thank God he has a most sensitive conscience that is unforgiving towards him. But he is fretful. He has not that abundant experience of the divine in him and so he worries. "7

* * *

Gandhiji's constant effort was to express the essence of the Divine in himself as well as in his close associates. We can call this search for the Divine spiritualism. He believed in a life as a whole and so did not differentiate between spiritual, ethical, or worldly attitudes. He was ever awake to inculcate the fundamental values such as truth, non-violence and celibacy not only in behaviour or speech but in mind, speech and action. That is why Gandhiji has talked about the experience of the Divine. On the other hand, he maintains that real wealth is the consistent addition to the wealth that is character; which meant the ethical side of life and the care to see that water was filled in the closet was the material side of life. To Gandhiji all the areas were important. The distinctiveness of his line of thought was that he perceived oneness in the varying fields of life — economic, social and political on one side and physical, ethical and spiritual on the other. Thus he had one final answer as to who should write the preface to his lectures and sermons. He said, "My practice of my views is itself the right preface. He who can read that preface will get an impetus to read through the book."⁸ He said this at Kheda in 1918. Towards the end of his life he said at Noakhali, "My life is my message." Behind these two sentences rests his belief that life is an endless penance, which cannot be divided into various sections such as thought, word and deed. The 'course of study' on which Mahadev's training was based, resulted from this fundamental belief. Here is an instance :

"Harilal had asked me to procure a recommendation for him from Manu Subedar and send it to Calcutta. As I had raised no objection and timidly submitted to Harilal's wishes, Bapu gave me what I should call a fatherly admonition. I was both amazed and charmed with it, as it showed at once Bapu's unparalleled love and concern for me, his intense desire to round off the angles in my nature, and, what was more remarkable, his perfectly correct discernment of my faults."⁹

This was written after barely six months of Mahadev's association with Gandhiji and so it was natural for him to be amazed. Moreover, his devotion was such that he kept on being amazed at Gandhiji's words till the last moment of his life despite his hearing them daily. Generally, a person gets annoyed or irritated at being criticised, but Mahadev was delighted by it. He expressed Gandhiji's opinion about himself in Gandhiji's own words :

"You are extremely pliant, . . . and this I point out not as a merit in you, but as a defect. You succumb completely to the atmosphere around you. You do not display the mettle to resist and rise above a debasing environment. That means you would be a prey to evil influences, if you happen to be in their midst. You are like a painter who cannot help depicting obscenity in his portrait, if he chanced to see an indecent scene. Instead of completely detaching yourself from an unclean surrounding, you take interest in it and are even tickled at it."¹⁰

Accepting the charge rather easily, Mahadev said, "Your analysis is perfectly correct, I admit, and I am going to strive hard to remove the defect. But how can I arrogate to myself the work of reforming such a big man as . . . ?"¹¹

In reply to this Gandhiji taught a principle :

"Where is the question of reforming anybody else ? . . . Nobody ever reforms others in this world. We have to reform only ourselves. Get mentally detached from your associates, and through this simple aloofness, you can stamp your presence on others. People must realize that some kind of talk has to be discontinued, immediately you happen to come to them. You can be said to have impressed yourself on others, only when they would be ashamed to use filthy language or talk about any incident in your presence. You must learn to remain always in an entirely pure environment."¹²

* * *

Gandhiji had found the royal highway to create a sanctified atmosphere — physical labour and a hard life. He had not found that way out of despair in life or through disdain for himself. He looked at life in a very positive way. He had said, "Life to me would lose all its interest, if I felt that I could not attain perfect love on earth."¹³

To Gandhiji even a hard life became full of joy because of his positive attitude. Mahadev wrote :

"Early in the morning he left for Navagam. It is ten and a half miles from Barejadi Station, but he decided to foot out the distance. . . . In the style of a soldier . . . he held in his hand . . . a round box containing what . . . he would be glad to eat and what could match chocolates, i.e. sweet balls made from ground

nuts mixed with ghee and jaggery. He began to eat them and with childlike joy observed, 'I am going to take up profession of a soldier. I have done many such things in Africa.'¹⁴

A hard life and constant awareness were the means by which Gandhiji kept the atmosphere around him, pure. The next after awareness was control of the senses. Gandhiji advised Harilal in a letter that "our virtues are not inert but are full of a divine spark. You have so far led a thoughtful and self-willed life. I wish you turned a new leaf, and became thoughtful and restrained now. . . it is the very *dharma*, the *purushartha* (human exertion) of every one of us to gain mastery over them (impulses). Make that effort, and all your faults will be forgotten and forgiven."¹⁵ A man's habit must be his servant, but at times it is the man who becomes its servant, and this could be cured by *purushartha*, is what Gandhiji believed.

Mahadev's *purushartha* attempted to control habits by keeping Gandhiji's living example in mind.

This human effort did not end with control of the senses. It required practical sense and ingenuousness. Mahadev and Devadas were allowed by the organisers of The Servants of India Society to attend a meeting with Gandhiji. Others, who were not members, were stopped from attending. When asked by those who were not allowed to attend Mahadev, out of sheer artlessness, told them that he had got special permission to attend. Next day he received a reprimand from Gandhiji.

"You did not act wisely yesterday. Why did you tell that you were given a permission to attend the Annual Celebrations of the Society (Servants of India Society)? All you should have stated was simply this: 'According to the rule of the Society, outsiders are not allowed.'"

"But would it not be a lie? It was Dev who gave me and Devdas the permission," I asked.

"Bapu: No, you would not have been required to tell a lie at all. There was nothing wrong in telling him 'You can't go there since the rule forbids.' He would never have then inquired of you whether you were going there or not. Had you confined yourself to pointing out the rule to him, you could have avoided the surge of bitter resentment and *himsa* (violence in thought) in his heart and even saved the Society from his ill feelings. It was simply because Dr. Dev had expected that you would keep silent about the permission given to you, that he (Dr. Dev) had asked you to convey to . . . the refusal of permission to him. But I demurred, 'Was that a gentlemanly act on the part of the Society? Certainly not.' 'Why not?' Bapu answered: 'I may be accompanied by any number of men and

they may be holding a variety of views — friendly or otherwise. How can the Society admit all of them . . . you, they knew, very well — as a detached onlooker — and trusted you as a man of principles. So they would let you in. But it's all right. What I mean to say is that it would have been better, if you had been a little more discreet.' ”¹⁶

In this way Mahadev went on receiving his training, at times through affectionate reprimands, sometimes through interview with people and through the issues discussed therein; also through the letters written to people and all the time through constantly being a witness to Gandhiji's life. During this time there used to be many incidents when Gandhiji engaged Mahadev in a discussion with himself or to express a different opinion. Once he asked Mahadev : “Did you read again my letter to Andrews ? I want you to be a critic. Did you find no point whatsoever in it which would provoke you to take up cudgels against me ? I wish Polak were here with me to-day. He would fight every inch of the ground before conceding any of my points, compel me to think deeply and draw me out to a firm and final decision.”¹⁷

H.S.L. Polak was one of the very close associates of Gandhiji in South Africa. He was instrumental in transforming Gandhiji's life totally by giving him to read during a journey, John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. Gandhiji was constantly finding Polak's virtues in Mahadev since he met him. He used to keep Polak informed about his activities in India. Four months prior to his telling Mahadev to take up cudgels against himself he had written to Polak :

“As for my activities, I am asking Mr. Desai to keep you informed. He has thrown in his lot with me. He is a capable helper and his ambition is to replace you. This is a mighty feat. He is making the attempt.”¹⁸

Encouraged by Gandhiji's suggestion of even having a fight if necessary to express the difference of opinion Mahadev continued with reference to the former incident :

“So I began to put forth my objections against his letters to Andrews. ‘Would a man who understands that the Indweller is apart from the body and who lives a life consistent with his knowledge, ever swept off his feet by the infatuation of driving back the invading hordes of foreigners ?’ ”¹⁹

Mahadev entered this whole conversation in his diary in the form of a dialogue :

Bapu. No he would not. But he would certainly possess the power to do so. It's different matter whether he uses it or abstains.

I: Do you mean to say that in this climate of foreign domination there is no individual in the whole of India who has realized the Self? If that is your belief, the old quarrel between us raises up its head again. I for one have a deep-rooted conviction that there are such men. They are entirely indifferent about these mundane matters. They don't care a rap whether there is an invasion of India or a conflagration that burns it up."

Bapu: There may be, But I have my doubts.²⁰

Mahadev was like a Janak Videhi, totally detached from earthly considerations, and faith in people with knowledge and Gandhiji seemed to be testing that faith by the measuring rod of reality

I: Am I then to understand you to mean that political serfdom blocks the way to Self-realization? You know you have asserted that you have entered the political arena to reach that goal?

Bapu: Yes, that's true in my case. I am prepared however to say that there may be individuals here and there in whose case political subjection may not come in the way of Self-realization. But what about people at large?

I: I am speaking for stray individuals only. The public is never going to win spiritual freedom *en masse*.

Bapu: I agree. About the masses you are right. I hold at the same time, the belief that it is impossible that even such a self-realized Master (*Jnani*), who has taken a vow of silence, can remain an unaffected witness and refuse to influence the atmosphere even with his thought, if he be in Ahmedabad in the midst of a revolution so ablaze as this one. I don't think there can exist men who remain so indifferent.²¹

Mahadev did not want to stretch the argument to the point of faithlessness, and so he said, "Let us then drop the subject, and agree to differ." Maintaining his original faith in such ascetics and men of knowledge, he ventured to say, "There seems to be no meeting point between us."

Referring to the same letter, written to Andrews, he changes the subject under discussion. He said: "You call the maimed and decrepit as 'bereft of senses' Do you think they have lost even the subtle senses along with their physical?"

Bapu: No. I am talking only of those who are deprived of their subtle senses also. Even that man who has lost his hands and feet is not free from the cruel desire of killing others

I: Then that point must be clarified. Can you say that with the loss of any of the senses even the hankering after enjoyment through them leaves the man?

Bapu. No, not at all. The impotent are consumed with lust even more than others ²²

Thus Mahadev accedes to Gandhiji's demand of strengthening a thought through aggressive discussion in that very dialogue. He noted down a fundamental doubt in his diary, not as a question but as an opinion. "Then I have another difficulty. I wonder how these people are going to imbibe in six months the courage you want them to possess? I am afraid even after returning from the Front, they will lapse into their old spinelessness."

In the evening Mahadev discussed the recruitment question from another angle :²³

"Bapu," I said, "I very much fear that after all your stress and strain the thing will end in smoke, we may not have to go to the front at all. I feel they will not have any need of our recruits because the War will end before our preparations for going to the Front are complete."

Bapu What a happy consummation that, if things turn out as you say ! But even that simple possibility we people are too blind to anticipate.²⁴

Gandhiji was spared from facing this problem which remained only in his imagination because the need did not arise for the recruits to go to the Front.

* * *

Mahadev's diaries of these early years give prominence to the copies of letters mainly written by Gandhiji and some that were addressed to him. Letters from people like Vinoba cover innumerable pages and so they are preserved till today. Mahadev used to copy down Gandhiji's letters verbatim whilst merely taking down the essence of some other letters. This was no doubt due to his devotion to Gandhiji, but it also displayed his comprehension regarding Gandhiji's place in the history of India. But the most important part was the training that Mahadev received. The seeds of the ideas that were going to help him through understanding them to be one with Gandhiji, are found in these letters. It is neither possible, nor necessary to go through all these letters, but a glance at a few of them relating to different fields would give an indication of different aspects of Mahadev's thought process during his period of initiation.

Gandhiji explained to Mahadev that life should be taken positively and not negatively. He once wrote :

"Never allow your spirit of sacrifice to go to the length of making you sour and disgusted with yourself and your surroundings . . . We sacrifice truly only when we expect no response. It is well worth knowing the root meaning of 'sacrifice'. It means, as you might know, 'to make sacred' We

make neither ourselves nor others sacred when we are irritated or angry. . . ."²⁵

This positive attitude towards life always kept Mahadev cheerful and he derived joy out of renunciation.

Gandhiji believed the Inner Voice to be the final support for any final decision. Because of this he did not hesitate to go against his closest friends or even respected elders, if necessary. There was a time during Mahadev's initiation that he (Gandhiji) had to oppose people such as Sir Dinshaw Wachha and Sir Surendranath Bannerjee. He said at that time :

"There is a sacred and indissoluble tie binding me to (them). . . . But there are times when you have to obey a call which is the highest of all, i.e. the Voice of Conscience . . ."²⁶

Gandhiji desired salvation. His aim in life was to reduce himself to a zero. He perceived God in Truth and had spent his whole life in achieving him through spiritual endeavour. But to get salvation he had not accepted the path of renunciation. He once wrote.

"Every *vritti* (ripple in the mind) as *pravritti* (activity) aimed at the attainment of *paramartha* (the Highest objective) is in reality *nivritti* (serenity) and hence a step to *Moksha* (final beatitude).

"To serve others is to make an attempt to attain *paramartha*, because it needs *purushartha* (spiritual endeavour) to draw one's concentration from one's own little self and fix it on the good of others."²⁷

He considered service as philanthropy and considered all the activities undertaken for philanthropy as renunciation. Of course, the activities should be conducted with a detachment. He considered detachment as the primary message of the Gita, and believed that his own gift — Satyagraha — had a connection with it. He wrote to Sakarlal Dave, a renowned educationalist of Gujarat,

". . . It is certainly the Bhagvad Gita's intention that one should go on working without attachment to the fruits of work. I deduce the principle of Satyagraha from this. He who is free from this attachment will not kill the enemy but rather sacrifice himself. Killing an enemy proceeds from impatience and impatience proceeds from attachment."²⁸

After this argument he clarifies that he has arrived at this certainly not through arguments but through experience. He continued,

". . . I have no desire to convince you or anyone else with the help of arguments. Even if I wished, I do not think I have the ability. I have something far more powerful than argument,

namely, experience. As far back as 1889, when I had my first contact with the Gita, it gave me a hint of Satyāgraha and, as I read it more and more, the hint developed into a full revelation of Satyāgraha. That a man of Krishna's intelligence should indulge in all this wisdom of the Gita for the benefit of an Arjuna in flesh and blood, would be like killing the buffalo for a leather strap."²⁹

During this time Mahadev clearly saw that the basis of Gandhian philosophy was the exposition of Gita achieved through experience by him (Gandhiji). This fact was enough to inspire Mahadev towards a continued study of the Gita for which he already had an attachment

* * *

All this gave rise to Gandhiji's and Mahadev's ethical concept.

The centre of spiritualism is God One, who realises the principle that Truth is God, does not take long to find out the basis of ethics (or morality). Mahadev saw that some ethical values can change with time and space. But there is an essential part of ethics which remains unchallenged by space or time and that is Truth. Honesty is the practical manifestation of Truth. To Gandhiji honesty was the touch-stone of ethics. And so he lived his life like an open book and had faith in the ethics of one whose life seemed to be an open book. He had said about a lady who was in public life :

"There is, of course, in her behaviour . . . a freedom which may appear to the strictly orthodox as going beyond the limits of modesty. She revels in fun and frolic — even mischievous pranks. But to me it seems she is just the sort of person to whom all that befits. I know her husband well enough. He, too, is a brave soul. He has the largeness of heart to give her the fullest freedom. They simply . . . dote upon each other. I think she never hides from the public gaze her conduct with anybody. This fact itself is a proof of the purity of her soul."³⁰

Truth to Gandhiji is the foundation of character. Mahadev noted down even the few words of valuable advice Gandhiji uttered when playing with children :

"You may embroider any design of your choice on the cloth, but its texture must necessarily be of good yarn, close-woven and clean. What I mean by texture is your basic character. The design you weave on it may be of any pattern you like — any branch of learning you have an aptitude for — mathematics, languages, science or any other — but none of these designs is of any use in keeping the basic texture clean and unsullied. It is only by self-restraint and by good thoughts,

good company and good books that you can keep the texture clean."³¹

Mahadev listened to every word of this simple advice and kept on repeating it to himself.

* * *

Gandhiji had undertaken a far-reaching task during these days. Durgaben's letter, quoted earlier, indicated that she was expecting Gandhiji to go to Champaran from Indore. He had gone to Indore to preside over the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Hindi Literary Conference). If Gandhiji became a president of any institution, that institution became electrified. During this time he undertook an important step to work for the development of the national language.

He sent his youngest son Devdas, who accompanied him in most of his tours and whom he found very promising, to South India to teach Hindi and to develop people's interest in it as a national language. This work was going to have far-reaching effects on the country. Devdas contributed primarily in propagating Hindi in the Tamil speaking area. Unfortunately, the politicians muddled up this subject years later, and totally spoilt the situation. Otherwise, it was a very important step where language was concerned. Whether Gandhiji was at Kheda, Ahmedabad or Champaran, he wrote regularly to Devdas. Occasionally he wrote :

"There is almost an unbridgeable gulf between the Dravidians and the other Indians. The shortest and the most effective bridge is undoubtedly the Hindi language . . . There is something undefinable about Hindi which makes it the easiest language to learn, and somehow or other there is a licence taken with Hindi grammar, such as I have not known to be taken with any other language."³²

At another time he wrote :

"Only a very clever and experienced teacher of riper years is usually employed for a work of your type. Even if such a one could be found, the question stands whether in a city like Madras a sufficient number of students would be forthcoming to take advantage of his presence."

He once wrote :

"You will be solving a question of great national importance, if you succeed in giving, and the people of the Madras Presidency in receiving, the gift of the knowledge of Hindi. That would mean constructing a bridge that joins Madras with other parts of India. An iron bridge over the spacious Ganga requires less skill and patience than you need build that cultural bridge. All your innate and acquired proficiency will have to be requisitioned to make Hindi for beginners easy and

pleasant to learn To be able to do so, you must go through books on Hindi, Gujarati, English and Tamil grammar, whenever you find time From them you are sure to get some clues to enable you to teach your students in a way by which they can learn much from a little trouble on your part. You can, for instance, give them many words derived from the same root "³³

Mahadev compared Devdas's mission to South India to that of Mahendra and Sanghamitra's mission to Lanka.

Gandhiji gave a very important gift to the country in the form of constructive work. It was less dazzling than the non-violent process in the face of injustice. But its result was no less far-reaching. Mahadev had started his career with rural service in Champaran. Thus he could easily understand the importance of Devdas's work in South India He wrote regularly to Devdas. Along with appreciation of Devdas's work the letters fulfilled the requirements of his job as Gandhiji's messenger to keep Devdas informed about his daily activities. Gandhiji once wrote to Devdas, ". . . Mahadev has been flooding you with news."³⁴

* * *

Within a short time of his joining Gandhiji Mahadev's activities began increasing like the flow of the Ganges, released from Lord Shiva's matted hair Added to Gandhiji's personal work he began to maintain notes of his speeches. He also began to explain Gandhiji's current important activity through letters, through discussions and through talks in big or small meetings In spite of all these varied activities, Mahadev never gave up his own study. He constantly and regularly read something or the other and was particular to read the material necessary for his own work. He had noted in his diary after observing an ostentatious welcome, "Only Walter Scott can describe such ostentation. I must read Scott."

In a reference to literature it must be said that not only Mahadev, but Gandhiji too had read a considerable amount of Gujarati literature during this period Literary discussions often took place between the master and the disciple. During Gandhiji's serious bout of dysentery in the midst of his recruitment programme, Mahadev used to read to him Anandshankar Dhruva's "Hinduism for Children" every morning. "Perfect", "A wonderful store house of knowledge", often exclaimed Bapu. He wrote to his very close friend C. F. Andrews "The essays are pure gold He is one of the greatest scholars of this Presidency. These essays have given me great comfort, and they help me more fully to realise the meaning of communion of the spirit. . . ."³⁵

The discussion of the play *Amarsatra* by Dolatram Pandya led them to a discussion of the word 'clumsy', Gandhiji said :

"Mahadev, *Amarsatra* is definitely a good play. The *shlokas* (stanzas in Sanskrit) also which appear in the latter part are quite good. The plot is worthless, but the play is well written."

I demurred, "What can I say when I have not read it ? But his style is sure to be clumsy."

Bapu : What's your idea of a clumsy style ?

I : That style is clumsy where any thought which could have been expressed in a simpler language has been deliberately put in a language difficult to understand in order to show yourself off, where, in short, the style does not enhance the charm of the literary piece but becomes a brain exercise. And Dolatram Pandya has the reputation of being such a writer.

Bapu : No. Whatever is difficult to understand is not necessarily clumsy.

I : Dolatram is definitely wanting in that lucidity which Ramanbhai possesses.

Bapu : True, but I won't call his style clumsy simply because the language is difficult. We don't call a language clumsy merely because it takes some time and thought to understand the meaning.

I : That style is clumsy in which language is deliberately made difficult without any need for making it so. Manilal's language is difficult, but not clumsy. Then there is Govardhanram who is ornate and high flown, but he has been acclaimed as a classic writer of a chaste style.

Bapu : All right. But has not Manilal often used difficult expressions where plainer ones would have sufficed equally well ?

"I don't think so," I insisted. The talk stopped there. Then I asked him, "Who, do you think among the English writers, has a clumsy style ?"

Bapu (After a little thinking) : We can't say. We have never been taught any clumsy writers.

I : Not Johnson, I suppose ?

Bapu : Certainly not.

"But," I put in with a meaning smile, "Austin's *Jurisprudence* may be termed clumsy ?" *Bapu* returned "I for one, haven't felt it tedious. He has a style of his own, which I found very interesting."

"Can you say", I objected, "it has the same felicity as Dicey (*Dicey's Law of the Constitution*) ?"

"No," he agreed. "You are right there. It (*Jurisprudence*) has not the smoothness and flow of Dicey."

Then after some time, "Have you read Stephen's *Digest of Evidence*?" Bapu continued. "I am simply charmed with the book. We must reproduce in our language all these law books also. But our lawyers! Which of them ever wants to speak in Gujarati? They are blissfully ignorant of the fact that the translation of such splendid law books into Gujarati would give a great fillip to the people's awakening. And our noted literary writers have yet to see the light as to what they should really do. They will translate worthless books, but does it ever strike them that they should do something in this direction — something that would rouse the nation?"³⁶

I said, "I have decided to read Dolatram Pandya now — after our talk. It will be one of my top priorities. I was sure that you would take up that book. That was why I got it out from the Library for you."

Bapu remarked: "I will read all such Gujarati books as I can lay my hands upon. I have made up my mind to go through the worst trash, if it is written in Gujarati. But with one exception. I cannot stomach the Gujarati translation of the Bible. The fact is that it goes against the grain to tolerate the same thing in poor language, what one has been delighted to read in a wonderful style for years together. The work of translating the Bible fell to the lot of foreign missionaries. The result was that a book that scales a towering height in spirituality and is at the same time a masterpiece in English literature turned out a parody of the original in Gujarati. But it has never dawned in the mind of a single leading Gujarati writer to translate that book. I wonder when any of them will get the inspiration!"³⁷

As Mahadev had read much more Gujarati and English literature than Gandhiji, when he saw Gandhiji excited over some Author, he only said, "It is the excitement of reading it for the first time."

These people could spare their time for poetical or literary humour only when either of them was ill. Otherwise the discussions related to social problems and would be mostly about Gandhiji's method of working. Mahadev seemed to have more liberal and original attitudes towards women than Gandhiji.

"Started from the Ashram in the evening. Ba accompanied him. I started later and had to run to catch them up. 'Mahadev,' he said rather sadly, 'it is more difficult to solve the worldly problems of family life than even the political questions of the

country Here is Ba. Chanchi has come and gives her company, but even then she yearns to stay with me at Nadiad.' I told Bapu that Chanchiben and Parvati were unhappy and were shedding tears (over Harilal's possible fate). Everyone is bewailing his or her personal sorrow. Bapu commented in reply, 'But we have the sorrows of all to worry and weep over And if we did so, twenty-four hours of the day would fall too short.'

" 'How helpless and dependent is woman !' I sighed, 'She has but to bear with her husband, no matter how he bungles in life, and suffer the consequences of his misdeeds '

"*Bapu* : But that is so with woman all the world over. I don't see any cause for regret in it. That is the very nature of womankind She cannot do without some support and she delights in her dependence upon some other person That is the very breath of her life. We men may earn and cudgel our brains for troubles outside the home and tell the wife, 'You need not worry over those questions, be at ease and bring up the children and keep them happy.' And that is quite the natural order of things. The she-goat is mild and helpless by nature, but does that make her unhappy ? Looked at from your angle, even her menses and her act of procreation are physically painful to woman but can they be regarded as an infliction upon her ?

" 'No', I admitted, 'but her helpless dependence is not as natural as all that 'It is,' reaffirmed Bapu 'Is it not true that no woman can do without some stay or support ? Even such a brave lady as . . . does require somebody to lean on. No woman can carry on without the help of some man ' "38

Does this discussion not indicate that Mahadev's humility pushed into the background his attitude of search for truth ? It seemed as if Mahadev did not go beyond a certain point while discussing with Gandhiji ! A question arises in our minds as to what advantage could either of them have gained from it ! Of course, Gandhiji's thoughts were always dynamic. And so the attitude towards women he had in 1930-32 was not the same that he had during 1917-1921. Gandhiji presented the key to freedom to the women of India during the movement of 1930 Salt Satyagraha, 1932 another Civil Disobedience. Mahadev's attitude must have been one of the factors that worked towards this progress in thought. Gandhiji's view on widow re-marriage was a bit more crystallized. He said :

"As regards widow-marriage, I hold it necessary for both a widow and widower to refrain from marrying The fundamental basis of Hinduism is control of the senses. Self-restraint has a

definite place in all religions, but in Hinduism it has been raised to the high rank of an indispensable virtue. A second marriage in that religion must take place only in exceptional cases. These are my views on principle. But at present child-marriages continue to be performed unhampered, and Hindu males go on indulging in one marriage after another without shame or constraint. So long as this unjust state continues, if a child-widow wants to marry, her wishes should be respected and no attempt should be made to stop her. I would not, however, sow the seed of a desire for a second marriage in the mind of even a very young child widow, but if she chooses to marry, I would not consider it a sin on her part."³⁹

As Mahadev has not commented on this we might deduce that he agreed with Gandhiji's views.

Mahadev considered himself to be very fortunate to be able to observe at first hand Gandhiji's fundamental gift to India during this period — Satyagraha.

To-day any type of programmes are planned in the name of Satyagraha. Mahadev recorded many incidents which indicated how precise Gandhiji was in defining the direction of Satyagraha. The following few extracts from "Day to Day with Gandhiji" give us some idea about how Gandhiji's mind was working on the subject :

"A gentleman — the sub-editor of *The Maratha* — came to see Bapu to discuss with him the proposal to launch Satyagraha against the Government's cancellation of the passports for England issued to the Home Rule Deputation. Bapu explained to him the Principles of Satyagraha; to wit, the Satyagrahi must be steadfast in his resolve not to accept defeat and to adhere to truth and non-violence, it should be such as can be offered by a large number of men, and no question of Satyagraha arises unless the opponent's action is brutal, tyrannical, immoral and unjust."⁴⁰

In another case five or six persons, led by Jerajani, lay down, obstructing the market gate and displayed boards saying, 'Go and Snatch the Bread from the Poor.' Jerajani took a pledge for a day's fast. Gandhiji called Jerajani and said to him :

"I don't see any Satyagraha in what you have done. Satyagraha is not a weapon which can be used to extract what you want by force. That is Satyagraha wherein you attain your objective through the method of love. It cannot be justice pure and simple that you get through the means you have employed. Is it fair to imitate my action without getting my approval before-hand? What you have done is not 'Satyagraha' but the very acme of 'A-Satyagraha' (anything but Satyagraha). It is

Satyagraha if you do not resume work and let your employers engage whomsoever they may.”⁴¹

Gandhiji wrote to Natesan, a liberal leader, that, “If you do not provide the rising generation with an effective remedy against the excesses of authority you will let loose the power of vengeance and . . . cult of violence will spread with a rapidity which all will deplore.”⁴²

To newspapers Gandhiji clarified : “A civil resister never seeks to embarrass Government. He often co-operates and does not hesitate civilly to resist where resistance becomes a duty.”⁴³

Mahadev fully realised from Gandhiji that non-violence and cowardice could never go together. In a public meeting at Betia in Bihar, he went so far as to say :

“ . . . While advocating the peaceful method, I never wish that the Indian ryots become unmanly. . . . If the policeman is about to commit atrocities and you prepare yourself to die at his hands, I will call you a brave man, a Satyagrahi. But it is better to beat him and drive him out, than simply to look on and cover yourself with disgrace. Satyagraha never means fleeing away and leaving the women of the family to their fate. . . . Do you consider that as Satyagraha ? I ask you, you have brought imposing long *lathis* (thick wooden sticks) here. Our religion does not teach us to be cowards and to go on meekly bearing with atrocities. Religion teaches us that it is better to give our own blood than to take the blood of the oppressor. If we thus prepare ourselves to shed our own blood, we become angels. But, if, at the sight of injustice perpetrated before our eyes, we show a clean pair of heels, we prove ourselves worse than beasts.”⁴⁴

On the subject of Ahimsa and *advesha* Gandhiji’s message was equally clear : “Ahimsa includes *advesha* (absence of malice) Volunteers, therefore, must never, even unwittingly, resort to unfair criticism of the opponents of the movement.”⁴⁵

“Methods of violence are not consistent with dignity. . . True *paurusha*, true bravery consists in driving out the brute in us and then only can we give free play to our conscience.”⁴⁶

* * *

During Mahadev’s initiation, through grasping Gandhiji’s principles, writing about them and acting accordingly, an incident denoted his confidence along with his devotion to Gandhiji.

Gandhiji had come to Ahmedabad after the Jallianwalla Bagh holocaust. The military was alerted in Ahmedabad. The bungalows at Shahibaug (an elite locality) were evacuated. Court Martial Ordinance No.4 was applied to Gujarat. Mahadev got agitated at all

this. Gandhiji said that there was no cause for agitation. Mahadev conjectured that the Government had released Gandhiji for a few days only to mobilise their resources and that all these preparations were to arrest him.

Bapu smiled, "What are you talking Mahadev ! Arrest me ? . . . Preparations for my arrest ? Impossible True, they will imprison others. . . . They will indeed isolate me, but me they will not touch." Still Mahadev believed that Gandhiji would be arrested. He said, "I assure you, not a tear will drop from my eyes this time, though one tear did drop from my eyes on the previous occasion."⁴⁷

He was also afraid of their resorting to firing. Gandhiji dismissed the idea as absurd. Mahadev insisted that there were officers who were not bothered if the Government was disgraced but that they might give order to shoot. Gandhiji accepted this contention but insisted that it would be against the British tradition.

Mahadev argued that the oppression that was being carried on was also against the tradition. But Gandhiji had faith in the Government that it would not resort to such extreme tactics. They would not order firing at him, when they did not resort to it even where people like Savarkar and Ajit Singh were concerned. Mahadev reminded him about Reginald Craddock saying, "a misguided saint is more dangerous than a hundred agitators." Bapu said, "What's wrong with this remark ? And what a happy consummation if they shoot me !" Mahadev then argued, "In South Africa you were not only one but thousand in one. But here we are only a handful at your back !" "In South Africa", Bapu pointed out, "genuine Satyagrahis were few enough to be counted on one's fingers. There are many more of sterling worth here." He said, "If they shoot me, people are sure to rise in revolt. There would be a revolution, and I cannot be held least responsible for any bloodshed that may follow." Mahadev haltingly asked, "If you are executed, and your devoted followers, in their blind fury, commit violent outrages, is not their action likely to distress your soul ?" "Undoubtedly", Bapu said. "If that happens, it would be an extremely painful result. It would only mean that they had not learnt the ABC of Satyagraha. Satyagraha itself would be tainted. What you can do, however, is to resort to such extreme (non-violent) measures as would compel the Government to sentence you also to death." "Quite true," I (Mahadev) said, "your word, Bapu, shall be honoured."⁴⁸

Then in tone of finality Bapu asked Mahadev to go to sleep. But his mind revolved round the same subject. He asked a question after seeking Bapu's permission, "Bapu, you once told us that a man must be judged from his act and not as an individual apart from them . This morning you said, 'How can we hate anybody ? It is

his deeds which we may hate', if your former precept is true, this latter view seems to be rather inconsistent and defective. If a man's actions are a prerequisite for basing our adoration for him, how can we isolate a man from his misdeeds and hate them only ?"

Gandhiji said, ". . . Hatred of an act elevates our character and that of an individual lowers it."

Mahadev said, "I accept your argument from the moral angle, but psychologically it seems impossible. . . ."

Bapu said, ". . . You put down as it were, the arithmetical rule of three ! If we respect a man for his qualities and acts, we must hate him for his vices and misdeeds. The other day when I met the Governor, he gave vent to very exasperating remarks, but was I, therefore, in any way angry with him ? Not in the least. I for one would sincerely render him personal service if I got a chance. . . . There is no man on earth who commits a sin with the full awareness of his wickedness. . . . The reason for having no hatred for the Englishman is because I realise that anybody who belongs to a ruling race would behave exactly as he does. My duty is, therefore, to reform the ruler's mentality through my loving service. . . . The feeling of hatred in a man is a sign of his moral weakness. . . . Call it love or compassion, whatever you like, but that feeling indicates moral strength. Hatred shows the extinction of the religious spirit. Man's charity springs from innate generosity. . . . The really brave are generous." After listening to the discoverer of Satyagraha describe the battle-plans of a brave Satyagrahi, he merely said, "I have got your point." He accepted that he had despised those that had censured Gandhiji which showed that his religious spirit was not sound, and that indicated his own weakness. But at the same time he confirmed, "I have shaken myself free from that feeling." This reminiscent of the sentence of the Gita, 'Thanks to Thy grace . . . my delusion is destroyed, my understanding has returned.' Bapu said, "Yes, I can quite understand your attitude. But I know I am right in saying that there is no hatred whatever in my mind. I also know I invite by this assertion the charge of claiming to be extraordinarily large-hearted. Why should there be any constraint in stating what I really am ? Though I am now fifty, shall I tell anybody that my age is forty-nine ? . . . Did I hate my brother though he was a drunkard, a pilferer and a smoker ? Never." "But," Mahadev interposed, "in that instance it could be argued that it was because he was your brother that you behaved lovingly with him." Back came the answer, "Quite true. That is just why. . . . I have said that a man who behaves lovingly with his family has gone a step above the level of the beast. . . . When he experiences the same love for his village, he rises a step higher. He who loves his province is

above him. In this scale of progress, comes at the top the rare individual, who, instead of hate and anger, returns love for the most venomous opponent in the whole world, and who is large-hearted enough to consider the whole world as his kith and kin. (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) O ! the majesty and sublimity of such large-heartedness ! The man can behave like a king, no matter how hard he is struck by his opponents . . . and believe me, it was due to this attitude that I did not feel the blows that Mir Alam rained on me in South Africa."

On hearing this, Mahadev, the devotee, said, "My heart was surcharged with awe and reverence towards this soul elevated to such high-mindedness. And I could not desist from expressing my feeling I had tears of joy, I bowed before him and said, 'Please forgive me May I assure you that my feeling of hatred is also no longer there ?' "49

* * *

The most important training in the period of initiation was obtained during the constant touring with Gandhiji. Soon after coming to India he had started to travel by the third class in the railway trains. In the later years, a small unofficially reserved third class compartment was set aside for him. Till then — for nearly twenty-two years, he travelled third class like other passengers, without any differentiation. Actually the vast crowds that gathered at all stations to have his *darshan* regardless of night or day, added to the inconvenience of his travels. During these journeys Mahadev, not only put up with the discomforts, but undertook to save Gandhiji (though not always successfully) as far as possible from these troubles. As Gandhiji's entourage increased during his travels, other youngsters did share in protecting Gandhiji from the crowds. Yet it fell to Mahadev's lot to look after and keep the numbers of the entourage happy.

During the initial period the members travelling with Gandhiji were few. Mahadev was a constant companion. Quite often Devdas and Kasturba were there and occasionally some Ashramites travelled with him. But on each journey a local man of the area where Bapu was going, would accompany them. The first impression of travelling with him was of crowds, noise and running about. Here is an instance from a letter addressed to the readers of *Navajivan* :

"It is nine p.m. now. I am writing this letter in the train going to Calcutta from Bhagalpur. This is the only time when I can have some quiet. The stream of visitors and public meetings take up my daytime fully. At every station, even at night, hundreds, nay, thousands, eager for Bapu's *darshan*, would always be seen waiting on platforms. One is, therefore, compelled to keep awake at least during the first half of the

night. Not that people don't come at 2, 3 and 4 a. m. but by that time we would be so exhausted that we would begin to doze and be half asleep despite their invasion. But the early hours of our nights in a train are always a vigil for us. The interval during which the train is in motion is one of quiet and hence of work."⁵⁰

At times the journey became so troublesome that even Gandhiji experienced discomfort. The keen desire and insistence to have Gandhiji's *darshan* did not allow the people to think about the discomfort that he would have to undergo. Mahadev himself writes of another occasion :

"We reached Bhatni and the craze for Gandhiji's *darshan* reached its climax. As it was, owing to the preceding invasions, the train reached there at 12 midnight instead of the scheduled 11 p.m. As the people could not have the *darshan*, they got furious, and in spite of all our earnest pleading, stood on the track, in the front of the engine. Cries of, 'We won't allow the train to start till we have the *darshan*' came from many lips. I got down again and fell at their feet all to no purpose. I grew wild at last. I began to say things I should not have uttered. I told them that Gandhiji had offered Satyagraha for such insistence against only 2 men in the Punjab and had kept standing for 2 hours in the train. I warned them that, as a result of this tumult, Gandhiji might stop travelling or undergo some unimaginably severe form of Satyagraha. But they were stone-deaf to all my frantic appeals. On the contrary, they tried to put us to shame by repeatedly asserting, 'We have come for the *darshan* of the Lord. However can we feel ashamed of it?'

"Any sleep for Gandhiji in the midst of this uproar was out of question. But he kept lying at full length without a word. We had hoped for some quiet after leaving Bhatni, but that hope too, turned out to be a mirage. The people's *hathagraha* (mule like-obstinacy) was repeated at each and every station that came after Bhatni. At last even Gandhiji's endurance and tolerance were exhausted and he got up at one station when it was 1.30 a. m. He began to entreat the people 'Please go away. Why do you harass us at this dark hour?' He was answered only by sky-rending shouts of *Gandhiji ki jai*: Many in the crowd were even saying that they would not move till the train started. Gandhiji repeated his request in pathetic tone, but who would care to listen? I have not the pen to give a picture of the distortion Gandhiji's ever gentle features then underwent. I too had enough of the torment. I could not imagine what the outcome would be. Never before had I seen Gandhiji in a state

of rage and I was literally trembling. At last he beat his forehead with his hands in desperation and said, 'I fall at your feet. Please be good enough to move away.' That was the height of the people's love-mad insolence. Only after Gandhiji beat his forehead thrice, did the people get quiet."⁵¹

But sometimes a rewarding incident redeems such a situation.

We continue :

"An unknown gentleman saw our harassment. At every succeeding station therefore he would rush to our compartment in time and deliver a speech to the crowds in a very humble and heart-melting language. And fortunately the people would listen to him and disperse quietly. So this angel from heaven shifted on to his own shoulders all the load we were groaning under. The language of his speeches was remarkably chaste. It seemed he had digested all the principles of Gandhiji very well. At the end of his appeal for quiet, he used to exhort the people to observe non-violence, to boycott foreign goods and implement all the items of the non-co-operation programme. His devotion, his quiet firmness and his patience were a revelation to me.

"I asked his name. He said, 'I am Ramgopal. I am an ordinary, a very ordinary, businessman at Mhow and Secretary of the Khilafat Committee there.' That only increased my wonder. What a countless number of such silent workers there may be in the country, whose very existence is not known to most of us!"⁵²

Another inspiring incident is worth mentioning :

"At Patna station a stranger fanned Bapuji for a very long time, who then fell asleep in the train. The stranger got down at his destination without taking with him his thin cotton mattress, as Bapu's feet lay on it, and he was afraid lest Bapuji might wake up in his attempt to slide the mattress from under his feet. From his talk with us before he lighted, we supposed he was lower class employee in the police department and of very ordinary means. When Bapu got up, he felt deeply concerned and exclaimed, 'See how many a Sir Gibby can be found among men of no note who render silent service!' I too was really moved. 'I can't remember to have done one single act of such a really selfless service in all my life,' I said to myself.

"But I am mentioning this incident to show the bewildering variety of human nature. We were talking about the mattress in the morning and a Marwari passenger was quietly listening. When he was about to get down at the Mughalsarai station, he said, 'Why not give it (the mattress) away to me ?

You don't need it, I am sure !' Bapu was emphatic in reply. 'Never. The mattress shall be sent back to the owner.' "53

Experiences during travel were not confined to the railways. The greatest benefit to Mahadev from the constant, continuous travel with Gandhiji was that he saw and came to know his entire country. To-day it would be the Punjab, tomorrow Tamil Nadu. One day in Kutchh and the next Kamarupa. Mahadev made his acquaintance with India in this manner. He could see the heart of India by traversing the villages of Bihar, Central Provinces, Saurashtra and Karnataka. He learned to understand the questions and problems of the various places, came to know their customs, and enjoyed their peculiarities and beauty. Just as a new-born infant looks at the wide world from its mother's lap, Mahadev experienced the vastness and diversity of India after having left the confines of home, college and service to walk side by side with Gandhiji. Daily he used to meet new people. Mahadev had an innocence in his relationship with people. Some of the names were known to him — but he must never have imagined that he would meet them personally. Some of the people such as Sir Dinshaw Wachha, Surendranath Banerjee, Lokamanya Tilak, Lala Lajpatrai and C. Vijayaraghavacharya were so highly regarded that to-day's youngsters would flock for their autographs. Mahadev had met all these people and had corresponded with some of them. He was to be like a family member to two luminaries of those times, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das. The beauty was that Mahadev had won over most of them as soon as he met them. His charming nature like that of a Mughal Garden Rose won over the hearts of one and all, his speech sweet as nectar bewitched even strangers. An affable and cheerful secretary like Mahadev was valuable asset even to Gandhiji. But the most important advantage to Mahadev was that of the very close friendship developed during this period with people who were later on to lead the whole country ! Some of them were elders but they looked upon Mahadev as a friend although he regarded them with respect. Vallabhbhai was one of them. All others were almost his age or a few years older — Rajendra Prasad in Patna, Kripalani in Muzaffarpur, Rajagopalachari in Salem. The first meeting with Jawaharlal at Principal Rudra's place was also during this time. Urmiladevi Sen, Chittaranjan Das's sister came in the picture a little later. But she was like a mother to him. His acquaintance with Dr Annie Besant was superficial. The friendship with Sarojini Devi increased as years passed. Except for older people all others died after Mahadev's death. For years, most of them have paid tributes to Mahadev, recalling the twenty-five years of association with him.

* * *

The greatest training during this period was that suited to a Secretary. Years later Mahadev's this relationship with Gandhiji vastly superseded that of an ordinary Secretary, but the ability required to become the Private Secretary to such a proficient, ever-progressive and illustrious man was easily cultivated by Mahadev in the first three to four years.

In Champaran only two weeks after he started working, Gandhiji handed over his nephew Jamnadas Khushaldas Gandhi's translation to Mahadev for scrutiny. Mahadev had learnt the art of translation before he came to Gandhiji, which was going to be very useful to him in his work as a secretary and it was going to improve with the passing of the years.

Mahadev's knowledge of languages was an asset to him as Gandhiji's Secretary. Their proficiency in English complemented each other, Gandhiji being more conversant with the legal language as well as fluency in speech, while Mahadev excelled in literary writing. Gandhiji had learned Tamil whilst working with the Satyagrahi labourers in South Africa. Mahadev's attempts at Tamil were largely unsuccessful. The two men learned Urdu while spending time in jail, years later Mahadev had read extensively in Gujarati, Hindi and Bengali languages, and could speak and write Marathi well. This proficiency in language was most useful in dealing with correspondence from all over the country.

Mahadev's other asset before joining Gandhiji was that of his beautiful handwriting. Gandhiji always was painfully conscious of his bad handwriting. But he could not improve it till the end. (When he started writing with the left hand, it was more legible.) Probably because of that he was inordinately fond of good hand-writing. Whenever he wrote to children he always mentioned about handwriting! Mahadev's beautiful handwriting was one of the reasons for Gandhiji being attracted to him. His friend, Narahari, also wrote a beautiful hand. He makes a note about Gandhiji's fondness for Mahadev's handwriting:

"During the Champaran days the Lt. Governor of Bihar told Bapuji that he was charmed with a man who had such beautiful handwriting who was with him (Gandhiji). Bapuji had said that if he wanted to send him to the Lt. Governor, he would introduce him through his handwriting. Sir John Maffey, the Private Secretary to Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, also was charmed with Mahadev's handwriting and that resulted in a very close friendship. He had once told Mahadev that there was not a single person in the Viceroy's staff who had such handwriting. The Viceroy also envied his handwriting.

"When Bapuji talked to him about the Lt Governor of Bihar, Mahadev said, 'Even Narahari's handwriting is beautiful. When I suggested getting your speech as the President of the Social Service Conference typed, you yourself said, when Narahari has written it in such beautiful handwriting, why should I read a typescript?' Bapuji said, 'You are right His handwriting is neat and I like it but its shape is not artistic.' Then when Mahadev said that even Chhaganlal Gandhi's handwriting was good, Bapuji replied that, 'Yes, Chhaganlal's handwriting can be considered good. But that is called copybook handwriting' " "44

Mahadev was as proficient in deciphering illegible handwriting as was his own hand beautiful. Gandhiji used to receive all sorts of mail. At times it was very difficult to decipher handwriting of people very close to them such as Devdasbhai and Pyarelal Sarojini Naidu's appeared beautiful but it was a difficult task to decipher it. So, Gandhiji used to hand over her letters to Mahadev as soon as they came and asked him to read them to him.

In a very short time Gandhiji began handing over the answering of letters to Mahadev instead of doing it himself. In later years Mahadev saw the incoming post, answered many of the letters, showed some of the answers to Gandhiji, and handed over the remaining letters to him to read and answer. Gandhiji said some months after Mahadev joined him, "It is not that I cannot do my own work, but with Mahadev present, I can accomplish double the amount." In a reply to Dhar's letter written on behalf of Ali Brothers he said, "I wrote minimum number of letters as Mr. Desai was not with me." Mahadev became a very important link in the chain of Gandhiji's daily routine.

During Gandhiji's indisposition, the Secretary handled some of the assignments on his behalf. Gandhiji could not address the vast audience of the public meeting at Triplicane Grounds in Madras. So, Mahadev read his written speech. This was only one instance among many. He had to repeatedly read out Gandhiji's speeches. Gradually, people appreciated the combination of Mahadev's voice with Gandhiji's presence.

The notes of the most of Gandhiji's speeches were found in Mahadev's note-book. And so, many newspaper reporters struggled to get copies of the speeches immediately after they were given, and later on after Gandhiji's death when the Government of India published his letters and speeches as *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, there are acknowledgements at innumerable places of having taken the letters and speeches from Mahadev's Diary.

Notes of Gandhiji's words did not mean the notes only of his speeches, Mahadev noted conversations he had with many known

and unknown persons. Not only that but Mahadev used to note down words Gandhiji uttered even in delirium or drowsiness. Here is an instance in the first paragraph of the notes of 21st January 1919 :

"BOMBAY : Bapu was operated upon for piles today. Slept till 8 30 p.m. Became unconscious then and began to rave. The last outburst during the delirium was very significant : 'These two things are a 'must' for the Government. It has but to annul the Salt Act and nationalize the milk industry. It passes my understanding how such a cruel tax as this on salt was meekly accepted by the people. The whole country could have been inflamed to revolt against the Government at the time the law was passed. How could there be a tax on salt so indispensable to human life ?'

"After he came to his senses he began to dictate letters at 12 midnight."⁵⁵

Mahadev undertook to write the description of long and tiring journey on their completion. These descriptions consisted of Gandhiji's speeches, his personal interviews and some important letters. Moreover it always had an extremely nice tone from the pen of a devotee. Gandhiji would merely write some comments on or article on the main topics of discussion during those days. It became Mahadev's responsibility to elaborate about the speeches and other matters. In *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* one repeatedly comes across sentences such as "I have not been able to give my thoughts on the Punjab Tour. Mahadev Desai has described it." In the eighteenth volume of the same series there is a reference to the fact that Mahadev had compiled the report on the speeches at Madras, Punjab, Santiniketan, Uttar Pradesh and Gandhiji had merely written articles on the subjects under discussion. *Mahadevbhai's Diaries* is the most authoritative source, next to *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* of Gandhiji's speeches, conversations and such other matters.

One other task fell to Mahadev's lot. He could do it effortlessly because of his identification with Gandhiji. This was to answer the criticism levelled at Gandhiji. In his answers he mostly quoted Gandhiji's words and so they became more authentic. An instance from the note of a speech given at Sangamner (Khandesh) in Maharashtra :

"I have been bathing in the ocean of love I meet with wherever I go. But that love is useless so long as some concrete strength is not generated from the warmth of that love. *I never like any worship or adoration of my person. I never like this touching of my feet, I am very averse to it. In it lies India's degradation and nothing else. That is not the way for India to*

win Swaraj. I want to see India stand erect. I want to see India stand face of face with all the countries of the world on terms of equality. I don't want Gandhiraj I don't want any individual's raj. I want one thing and that is Swaraj for all. That is why I don't want you to touch my feet."

I present the above two italicised expressions to Sir Narayan Chandawarkar. In a letter to *The Times of India*, he has charged Gandhiji in the following terms: "Gandhiji allows himself to be venerated as an *avatar* (God's incarnation), has no objection to people touching his feet and does not raise a syllable of protest against it." It seems that the Hon. Justice (Shri N. Chandawarkar) does not read even *Young India*. How can these emphatic declaration reach him then? (But if they don't, who is to blame?)⁵⁶

Occasionally there were mistakes in Mahadev's report. Gandhiji had given an address along with various other speakers in a large public meeting at Lucknow in October 1920. Mahadev had reported Gandhiji's address in some detail and the speeches of other speakers with fewer details. Maulana Abdul Bari's address was one of them. The speech was delivered in difficult Urdu language and probably Mahadev did not fully grasp it. He was conscious of this before it was printed, so he wrote at the end.

"I have thus put the Maulana's arguments in my words. I am likely to have erred, but I have stated his arguments to be the best of my understanding and remembrance. The occasion was so serious and every word of the exposition (on Islamic tenets) was weighed before utterance so nicely, that no report could be without some defect or other, unless the speech were reproduced verbatim."⁵⁷

A Christian gentleman entirely misinterpreted this report. Maulana Abdul Bari had talked about the murder of a Christian at Kheri in his original speech. One Mr. Douglas withdrew his support to the non-co-operation movement, stating that the Maulana had supported the murderer and called the victim a *kafir*. Mahadev wrote an article, 'An Innocent Mistake', and explained according to his own understanding, where he had erred in his report. Gandhiji made the following note at the beginning of the article.

"It is necessary for me to deal with the speeches themselves, and more especially the speech delivered by Maulana Abdul Bari Saheb. The difficulty of a reporter is at any time great, but when he has to take down a report in long hand, and at the same time to translate the speaker's remarks made in a tongue the reporter only half understands, the task becomes still more difficult. Such was the position which my co-worker, Mr. Mahadev Desai, occupied when he took notes

of the Maulana's speech. I saw his report after it was published in the *Navajivan* and was grieved about it. I thought that a serious though innocent mistake was made by him. The report does not do justice to the Maulana and makes him say that the murderer of Mr. Willoughby was a martyr and that he, the Maulana had accepted my word in preference to that of *Al Koran*. I consider Mr. Mahadev Desai to be one of the best and most careful of the co-workers I have the good fortune to possess. But the best of us may, in spite of the best of intentions, sometimes make mistakes."⁵⁸

Gandhiji then gave the gist of Bari Saheb's speech as he understood it, and concluded :

"It is unnecessary to say to a careful reader of *Navajivan* that, in his note at the end of his report, Sri Mahadev has given a complete satisfactory defence both of himself and of the Maulana Saheb.

"And Sri Mahadev, it is certain, did not take down a word-for-word report. Hence, I have put before the readers the flaws I saw in it. As for the errors in my report, other listeners to the speech can certainly point them out. But I must learn from all this what my responsibility as a journalist is. No editor can check every line that is printed in his paper. Had I seen Mahadev's report before sending it for publication, I would have assuredly made the necessary changes. But I am not prepared to find Sri Mahadev's fault either. A reporter had done his duty when he honestly and in good faith reproduces what he had heard and understood. The reader should bear in mind the difficulties of editors and reporters and read the paper after making allowances for these handicaps. If he does not do so, he does great injustice to journalists and can never take the best advantage from what he reads."⁵⁹

It was Gandhiji's nature to exaggerate his own mistake and accept it before the public. He did not desist even from exposing the mistakes of his colleagues to the wide world. In this case he called Mahadev's mistake an 'innocent mistake' and justified it somewhat after exposing all his other mistakes. In doing this, it was Gandhiji's attitude of evaluating everything with a sense of justice that was responsible and not his partiality for Mahadev.

Mahadev was a Secretary; but he was Gandhiji's Secretary which meant that he had to change his ideas of usual Secretarial work. Very often he had to become an inquiry commission for a particular problem, or a negotiator in some controversy; since February 1919 he had to shoulder all such serious responsibilities. The people complained against Bijolia, a small native state of

Mewad in Rajasthan. Gandhiji sent Mahadev to inquire into the matter and he was there for five or six days. No information regarding the problem or what was done about it is available. There are no notes in the Diary of this period for Mahadev did not write the diary when he was away from Gandhiji.

Another such important assignment came Mahadev's way in May 1921. The Government was of the opinion that the speech given by Maulana Mohammed Ali on 2nd May 1921 at Erode in Madras would encourage violence. The Viceroy had a talk about this with Madan Mohan Malaviya at Simla.

The Viceroy had hinted during the talks that the Government proposed to arrest the Ali Brothers for giving a speech which would encourage violence. Malaviyaji had requested the Viceroy to see Gandhiji before taking any step. Gandhiji went directly to Simla from Benares to meet the Viceroy as desired by Malaviyaji and Andrews. The Viceroy told Gandhiji during the interview that some paragraphs from Ali Brothers' speeches could easily instigate violence. When these paragraphs were shown to Gandhiji he accepted that it was possible, but he emphatically said that such could not be the Ali Brothers' motive. He said that he would contact them and persuade them to declare their regret publicly about the controversial parts of their speeches. The Viceroy said that if the draft of that statement was shown to him and that if a definite assurance as to refraining from speeches likely to encourage violence, was given to him, he would use his influence to stop the legal action against the Ali Brothers.

On the whole, neither side wanted to bargain. Gandhiji went to the extent to say that whether cases were admitted against the Bothers or not, the objectionable paragraphs should be shown to them and it would be his duty for the reputation of their (Ali Brothers) movement and the non-co-operation movement to advise them to give a public apology.

Gandhiji continued his tour the next day. He sent Mahadev to Bombay from Barshi in Maharashtra, to meet the Ali Brothers on his behalf. Mahadev explained to them that some of the paragraphs from Mohammed Ali's speech could be misinterpreted. A draft letter expressing regret was prepared in Simla. Both Mohammed Ali and Mahadev suggested changing one sentence in the draft and sent a telegram to Gandhiji to this effect. In the previous draft it was 'we accept that there are some paragraphs in our speech, the meaning of which . . . ' The sentence that replaced it was 'we could not imagine that the meaning of any paragraph from our speeches . . . ' And then the sentence began, 'but we sincerely . . . ' The meaning was that if any hint of violence was found in our pronouncements we

regret it¹. Gandhiji sent this suggested correction to the Viceroy by a telegram. No criminal case was admitted against the Ali Brothers. Mahadev had achieved success as a negotiator.

Ali Brothers were powerful in the country during these days. It was not easy to get a public statement of regret from such known leaders Mahadev must have had to use all his powers of persuasion to achieve what he did.

Thus Gandhiji was training Mahadev by showering love on him all the time; sometimes through togetherness and at others through separation; occasionally through praise, appreciation or rebuke; sometimes through fights, arguments and discussions; occasionally by giving new responsibilities and sometimes by examining in detail all the small tasks. The final goal being that of merging into each other, towards which Mahadev was rushing at an extraordinary speed.

FOOTNOTES

1. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. I, p. 131
2. *CWMG*, Vol. 21, p. 22
3. *Akshardeha*, Vol. 17, p. 85 (No mention in *CWMG*)
4. *Ibid.*, p. 314
5. *CWMG*, Vol. 21, p. 22
6. *Ibid.* p. 7
7. *Ibid.* Vol. 16, p. 482
8. M. D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. I p.10
9. *Ibid.* p. 100
10. *Ibid.* p. 101
11. *Ibid.* p. 101
12. *Ibid.* p. 101
13. *Ibid.* p. 1
14. *Ibid.* p. 178
15. *Ibid.* p. 117
16. *Ibid.* pp. 141-42
17. *Ibid.* pp. 180-81
18. *CWMG*, Vol. 14 p. 241
19. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi" Vol. I, p. 181
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.* p. 182
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.* p. 135
26. *Ibid.* p. 308
27. *Ibid.*, p. 200
28. *CWMG*, Vol. 15 p. 312

29. Ibid., pp. 312-13
30. M. D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, p. 85
31. Ibid. p. 154
32. Ibid. p. 136
33. Ibid. pp. 163-64
34. CWMG, - Vol. 14, p. 140
35. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi" Vol. 1, p. 246
36. Ibid. pp. 178 to 180 (Selected)
37. Ibid. p. 180
38. Ibid. p. 154
39. Ibid. pp. 149-50
40. Ibid. pp. 120-21
41. Ibid. pp. 276-77
42. Ibid. p. 300
43. Ibid. II, p. 71
44. Ibid. I, p. 149-50
45. Ibid. p. 305
46. Ibid. p. 318
47. Ibid. II, pp. 31 to 36
48. Ibid. II, (Selected)
49. Ibid. II
50. Ibid. III, pp. 141-42
51. Ibid. pp. 264-65
52. Ibid. p. 265
53. Ibid. I, p. 137
54. Narahan Parikh, *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharit*, pp. 63-64
55. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. I, p. 271
56. Ibid. Vol. III, pp. 286-87
57. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 287
58. CWMG, Vol. 18, p. 426
59. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi," Vol. II, p. 291.

CHAPTER XVII

SICKNESS

Mahadev had learnt the maxims such as 'Health is Wealth' and 'A healthy mind in a healthy body', but he hardly had any time to look after his health. Even in his childhood and youth, he hardly found time for games. He did not practise *yoga* as he grew up. Walking was the only exercise he was used to. He had traversed the Bombay roads during his college days. After joining Gandhiji very often he came to the *Navajivan* office on foot from the Ashram. From 1936 to 1938 he walked eleven miles daily, from Maganwadi to Sevagram and back and some days he did this twice ! Gandhiji gave him a target of 28 miles during recruitment days which he covered in his daily routine from the very next day.

But he was blessed with a strong physique and it effortlessly remained well. In his twenty-five years' 'service' with Gandhiji only twice he took long sick leave. Otherwise he took no holidays like Saturday-Sunday, Dassera Diwali, Birthday-Death anniversary, *bandh* or strike. In his third sickness he bid the final adieu !

The first sickness was in September 1919. In the beginning he thought it was just a fever due to exertion. But as it did not come down to normal for days together, he came to know that it was typhoid. Gandhiji believed in the maxim that any sickness was due to some mistake of the man himself and it was specially due to indulgence in the matter of food. Once he had written even to a Leader like V. S. Srinivas Shastri :

"You need a strict doctor who would mercilessly order a complete fast and water treatment. But you can expect nothing but licensed murders from that most empirical of professions. Whenever I hear of your illness, I feel like shooting some doctor or other but my *ahimsa* comes in the way. Happily for you and India I have no parliamentary ambition. Otherwise I should introduce a Bill disqualifying people getting continuously ill from Membership."¹

Mahadev was in the hands of such a 'strict doctor'. During this long period of sickness, it transpired that Gandhiji had to remain away from the Ashram. In a way it seemed to be good for Mahadev or so it was felt, because he was saved from the direct observation of Gandhiji. He was such a doctor that even in his absence the rules of nursing in the Ashram were followed according to his orders ! But though hard without, he was soft as a flower within ! He wrote to some friends that Mahadev had fallen sick because of his self-willed attitude. On the other hand he wrote daily from wherever he was to know about Mahadev's condition. If at times he did not get any news, he would wait for a telegram. To save Mahadev from the exertion of reading he would occasionally write to someone who was nursing him. Once he wrote to Narahari, "But for Punjab, I would not stay here for a moment. I would come there and embrace Mahadev."²

Another time he wrote to Esther Faering, "He had an unequal burden to carry !"³

Once Mahadev had said whilst talking to her, "I do not have the right to stay in the Ashram, when I fall sick like this." The lady told Gandhiji about this. Referring to that Gandhiji wrote, "He is needlessly anxious about his health. He is prized not for his body, but for his spirit. It must be a privilege for freinds to nurse him in his illness."⁴

Gandhiji received letters about Mahadev's health from Narahari. He wrote to him, "I have been getting your letters regularly. They give me a lot of peace. Read my letters to Mahadev only when you want to. If you want to tear them off, please do so."

At times during his sickness, Mahadev used to get quick-tempered and impatient for Gandhiji's letters. Once he sent a telegram to him which only a lover would send to his beloved. "I am well on the mend. But why art thou so unkind ? Oh, for a love letter from you."⁵

Mahadev's sickness turned out to be of a long duration. The fever did not go down for six weeks. Then it took months to recuperate. He went to Matheran and Sinhagadh for a change of place and rest. It was intolerable for him to be away from Gandhiji even for recuperation. Gandhiji used to explain to him in letters that he would regain his enthusiasm, if he was away from him. Mahadev sought Gandhiji's refuge. Gandhiji wrote, "I thought you were the well-known Kabir banyan tree. If you want to become a graft of an Alphonso tree then go ahead, but it seems your desire is to ever remain a graft. . . I used to tell Polak that he had two wives. Mrs. Polak and myself. Because he would open his heart only to those

two, would sulk with the two. You also seem to have got into Polak's habit. But what will Durga say?"⁶

Mahadev had not written his diary from 11 September 1919 to 29 April 1920. It must have taken almost seven months including the period of sickness to recuperate and become completely well.

Durgaben was near him night and day, always alert. Over and above nursing the sick man, she had the responsibility of cooking and feeding all those elders who had come to nurse him. Haribhai rushed from Dihen when he heard about Mahadev's sickness. Dr. Chandulal 'Doctorkaka' — Chandulal Ghelabhai — had also come from Surat. He wrote in a letter after returning to Surat. "Have firm faith that God will bless that innocent child!"⁷

Ashramite friends who daily nursed Mahadev were very much there. One of the great pleasure of life at Ashram was that when any member fell sick there was no dearth of people to look after him and nurse him. Moreover, Mahadev was loved by all. No effort was spared in nursing him. A comment by his bosom friend Narahari is worth noting. He said, "It is generally believed that a patient exercises dictatorship over all the persons of the house as well as over his nurse. But Mahadev was an exception to this. When in 1919 he was down with typhoid for six weeks, I observed that he could remain very jolly and sweet even as a patient. In spite of intense pain he always maintained his sense of humour and kept every one round him laughing."⁸ An instance of his humour has been cited by Chandulal Dalal which is quoted below :

"Even twenty-five days after the onset of typhoid he used to write letters filled with humour. Once he wrote to Gandhiji, 'I get quite fed up lying in bed, so to-day I feel like laughing a lot and to make others laugh if I have the strength.' Then referring to the amount of work he (Gandhiji) had, he wrote, 'From where will you find time to laugh? But to-day you must spare half-an-hour for a sick man. Let us laugh.'"

In this letter he became boisterously funny writing about three types of sport — that of love, reasoning and false reasoning. Leaving aside the other two, what he wrote about love-sport has been quoted here :

"I have been bound by a knot of love by this fever. I want to describe to you the sport of love experienced during these twenty-five days.

"The natural question would be — who is the beloved in this sport? I am an Anāvī Lord. Is it ever possible for an Anāvī Lord to take the role of a woman? So the fever is the beloved — I am a romantic fellow, I have found her a name — *Tapibai*.

"You might think, had Durga's consent been taken ? The question is uncalled for. Because when did the Anavil Lords take the permission of the first wife when they married a second one ? And till I die the Dwaraka stamp of the behaviour of the Anavils is never going to be wiped off.

"This is only the prologue to the love-sport. You would now be keen to know about the sport. I shall now relate it — *Tapibai* came in the beginning for a few days and started humming to me. 'My love for you is there since a long-time.' I was trapped. Our love went on growing. Ten days passed. *Tapibai* liked the place and started frolicking. I went on getting more and more involved. Fifteen days passed and then twenty. We became almost inseparable. So much so that I did not even know whether *Tapibai* was me or I was *Tapibai*.

"But God knows what happened and as it is said, 'The course of true love never did run smooth.' On the twenty-third day some foe came between us. *Tapibai* was not seen in the morning. But as she had gone without taking leave, she came back saying, 'I have come back as I forgot to take leave.'

"The people around me have known our love-story and the quarrel at the end, and are saying, 'the two rogues are going to divorce each other on the twenty-eighth day.' "

Narahari was nursing Mahadev. Referring to that Mahadev wrote in the same letter :

"I am (you don't laugh) in love with him; this is the Anavla fellow's third affair — and I need not say that the beloved is Narahari. So naturally I am partial to my beloved.

"Lastly, 'O, Mohan, I am enraptured by your face, O, Mohan !' "

Mahadev has described his sickness as a 'royal sickness'. Once his close friend Vaikunthbhai came to see him. He said to him

"I am being nursed better than an emperor. Kakasaheb comes and presses my body twice every day. Narahari has taken upon himself the task of keeping ice continuously on my head, by first pressing the ice bag on his own head to give it the shape of a cap, Kakasaheb and Narahari give me a hot water sponge in my bed every day. Kakasaheb describes how gorgeous the hollyhock flowers in rows look in his compound, thus increasing my eagerness to see them. The musician, Pandit Khare, visits me twice or thrice and sings to me his melodious songs; Kishorelal entertains me by his talks on various subjects; Swami and Jugatram present themselves for my service every night, even after a hard day's work at *Navajivan*. My father and the doctor are always at my side. And over and above all this,

the post brings me a lovely letter from Bapu every day, in spite of his heavy work in the Punjab. Can anyone be better cared for?" Vaikunthbhai answered, "You truly deserve all this. All of it is being done for the right person."¹⁰

During the sickness he got the opportunity for soul-searching and prayers. Prayer to God was almost a constant feature during the entire period. Gandhiji's treatment for a typhoid patient was complete rest, cleaning the stomach by an anema once a day, sponge bath and only liquid diet.

During this sickness Mahadev wrote a poem on "A creature in distress due to typhoid":

"O God, Please bestow Thy splendour, light and dust in the
Thought, word and deed of the creature
Thou resideth in.

O God, Let not this creature's any impure desire be fulfilled
Till he is between determination and doubt.

Happen what may to the pure, auspicious resolves.

O God, Let the feeling ever rise in this life that I am not a
combine of the five elements but am

The ultimate Brahma of ever-lasting joy."¹¹

Mahadev often got tired of the protracted time that passed for his recuperation after his sickness. He repeatedly felt that he was not fit to be Gandhiji's colleague with such a body. Gandhiji wrote in reply to a letter expressing such a feeling. He said,

"Now it is necessary for you to abandon your despair and get out of your torpor. Strength will come by itself, it will not come through force. You will get it by doing the work you can while staying with me.

"From where can you buy peace? A king in his palace is likely to be terribly restless while a person in agony like Job can be peaceful. Did Bunyan not get peace in jail? Have you not experienced peace in your bed? If the soul has no vain exertion, it experiences peace. . . . What more do you want when your body can function? Do not check its motion, take enough action that is necessary. Who realises the strength of the saying, 'the explanation of man's bondage or freedom exists in the mind'? It does not lose its essence because it is constantly heard by us. And if you believe in its truth, you will mitigate your sorrow, your langour, your disappointment and your fancy by repeating it."¹²

There was a possibility about Gandhiji going to England for the Khilafat problem. He further wrote saying,

"I think now I should go. By I is meant we. I have written to Shaukat Ali. He is at Bombay. He had been called here.

Then we would know. You don't at all get upset — wait with a totally peaceful mind. Whatever is going to happen, will happen I have to worry about you, your clothes and other things; isn't it? So come along when I ask you to do so I am not in a hurry as I am sitting at home. . . . Cultivate the body firmly so that you can handle other things. . . ."¹²

Later on Mahadev had to go through a short period of sickness at Allahabad. At that time he made a request to Gandhiji in a letter to address him as '*Chū Mahadev*'. And then wrote that the value of that particular address has decreased as he had to ask for it. He quoted a Gujarati proverb, 'Anything voluntarily given is milk, if asked . . . it is water.' In reply Gandhiji reminds him of a proverb, 'Even a mother will not serve (food) without (the child) asking for it. . . .' Mahadev had quoted some *bhajans* in his letter. Gandhiji wrote :

"I got your *bhajans* and have read them. Maybe poetic talent grows during illness, but in displaying it, do you not delay your recovery? If you refrain from exercising it and even then it shows itself after recovery, it would be worthier of admiration.

"If we regard illness, as an opportunity for listening to the promptings of the inner voice (for self-examination) and constantly look within ourselves, that enhances our strength.

"I have received a telegram . . . telling me that your health is quite all right.

"May God grant you the strength to keep your vows

"May you both be happy and be active in service."¹³

As Gandhiji addressed him as *Churanjivī Mahadev* once again reminded him of the proverb 'that which is given without asking is like milk . . .' and wrote : "This is the reward of my begging —" and so "it is like water when asked for. But even water given by you is sacred like that of the Ganga and becomes milk for me."¹⁴

The *bhajans* that Mahadev had sent were not composed or written by him. So he wrote, "Did you think that the *bhajans* of well-known devotees were composed by me? Not by a single sentence have I given you that impression!" But he accepted the essence of Gandhiji's criticism as it applied to his other activities. "On getting better — . . . I have gathered the *exclamations* manifest through God, you may call them 'my poems'." -And then he described his divine experience thus :

"This criticism does not apply to poetry which does not have a form and only humming sounds are heard at every stanza. It is confusing to put down the humming sounds. This is my condition and I have quietened down after writing it. A

year and a half ago, during the typhoid fever that divine afflatus lasted only for three days and I dictated charming translations from my sick-bed. This time things have progressed a bit — almost all are original. If you say so, I shall burn them, for there is no likelihood of achieving fame from it; so how can there be any greed? Or else let them be as memories of my sickness. Let them remain as the memory of the innocent utterances during the comforting sickness which was like a medicine for the soul; and as a memory of the debt to God for leading the mind to benevolence in that difficult period. Not for anything else. I show them to friends out of my weakness — . I cannot make use of something which appeals to me only for myself — (just as, if Durga prepares a nice dish, I cannot but give it to Panditji or Jawaharlal). It was imperative for me to write these *bhajans* or poems — or else it would have had a contradictory effect.

"This is my psychological analysis. Panditji had not accepted it. One day he read my poem and expressed joy about it. But from next day he kept a strict watch over me and said, 'You are not allowed to write anything. And do not talk to me about your poetic genius or excitement or inspiration, neither should you show me anything that you write. I vow not to read it.'

"I said, 'I am prepared to take up total silence till you go to Delhi.' But he did not like it.

"I feel that Panditji did not understand my psychology of love, neither did that witty professor. He said, 'Bapu wants to make you his heir, but if you are drawn by poetry and *bhajans* Bapu will have to weep for an heir!' There is some reality in this witty criticism. Why am I besieged with spiritual dreams these days and not by those of *swadeshi* and *swarajya*? I have not had one such dream. Only one of my writings during sickness contains reference to India and yourself. But what can I do? How can I summon false dreams? It would be something like telling a nasty man to stop his prattle of sensuous talk he may be uttering in his dream. The difference is only this. The nasty man will claim to be good, while I do not claim anything. I have not been able to get over the misery of being ridiculed before the world by Gidwani, by misusing your sacred utterance of bestowing the title of your heir on me a few minutes before your arrest on the 9th April 1919. I have never considered myself fit for that position. My ambition — human effort — is only to achieve self-realization through tireless devotion to a saintly person. (I can hardly find any person saintly like you.) My *purushartha* is to keep Hanuman as the

ideal; to inculcate his sense of service, surrender and swim through by devotion and service. I have not liked any other *purushartha*; and am shaping my behaviour accordingly

"I have diverted. The poetic genius though stored, would befit better if it appeared after my getting better. How could I miss that valuable moment by being greedy for better in future? I saw that the condition lasted for three days in the last sickness, and then my poetic 'genius' (which had never appeared before, and I certainly had never written poems in English) disappeared and reappeared in my (present) sickness. Neither the pleasant hills of Matheran, nor the comfortable stay at Sinhagarh in your stimulating company could reawaken it. It only came back in my sickness. I was neither happy nor unhappy at getting it back. I felt that God had decreed my getting such blessed moments, such power of concentration for prayer, only in sickness. If you had read that excellent book, Prof. James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, I would not have had to go into these details.

"Now for the next point of criticism, 'Your duty was, not to send (or write) *bhajans*; but to get up from the bed!' Another sentence, 'If one considers the period of sickness as one of listening to the inner voice and watches oneself, one's merits increase.' The answers to both of these are in the above paragraph. But I would make one more confession in answer to these. Firstly, your criticism is apt to the extent that I had overcome my sense of duty when I allowed my fever to increase by dictating the translation of the article "Ashavad". Otherwise, I have only relieved my mental and physical burden by my exclamations and tears of joy and thankfulness during my sleepless nights. The second sentence of your criticism is immortal; but it remains only in one's desire and hope. That is the ideal condition. That also relates to the mental condition. One may submerge himself in divine happiness, another may talk about it. Both the things are possible. But the really heroic and connoisseurs, in Kabir's words are :

One who sees, does not say, One who says does not see,
One who hears does not explain, Enjoyment, prayer, sight,
anything.

One remains purposely stupid, Relinquishes strength, and
becomes weak.

Kabir says, no one can overcome such a devotee.

"My effort and *purushartha* is to become such an unbeatable devotee or a slave, but I do not know whether I shall succeed in this birth or not ! But to-day I am not that. And

so exclamation from my heart, expressed in distinct speech cannot be stopped. However, I shall try to observe silence. My mind does understand the essence of your words (written) on the day of silence. I have not written anything for the last two days. Perhaps my poetic genius is leaving me. Why should I worry?

"One other point regarding the same subject: You said, 'It was my duty to get better'; Motilalji said, 'You should not work yourself into a frenzy; you are an adjudged lunatic, you foolish boy, you should think more of your flesh and bone than of soaring in heights ethereal or aerial.' It was a fact that I was a little excited and annoyed, but it was also a fact that Panditji (in spite of being a doctor) had teased me a lot; and so I replied, 'I have thought so long and so much of flesh and bone that it was high time I thought of the spirit. I would recommend the same to you.' But those words were neither passionate nor wrathful. That they were sincere my heart tells me to-day. The words, 'the duty of getting better' remind me of Panditji's sentence. Of course, there is a lot of difference in the suggestive meaning of your words and Panditji's words. My aim is, 'Healthy life is better that keeps us aware of existence. If I am thinking of God I must stop that and think of regaining health.'"¹⁵

Once again Mahadev gets into a deep philosophic discussion in his letter:

"You do not value the hidden saints and hermits as you do those who perform actions without expecting reward. The question is whether a man could spend his life for self-elevation or not! And if he does that how could we hope to 'relieve the pain of others?' My favourite author B. L. Stevenson has pointed out the solution in one of his essays, wherein he has strongly criticized Thoreau's attachment to self-elevation, or should I say the condition of a wandering monk? (I am quoting the essence.)

"Of these two philosophies, the one pursues self-improvement — and a churlish mangy dog, the other up with early morn, in the best of health, follows the Nymph — Happiness, buxom, blithe and debonair. Happiness is at least not solitary — it joys to communicate, it loves others, for it depends on them for existence. While self-improvement dwindles towards the prig, the very name and appearance of happy man breathe of good nature, and help the rest of us.

"It is unjust to call a man who is bent on self-improvement, a prig — He may not desire 'relieving others'

pain', but he may hope to elevate himself by serving a saintly person. In this it is my humility and not priggishness. I do not covet to be a benefactor of the world, because I do not have that strength, neither can I have that attitude. I remember the *bhajan*. 'Whose welfare would you want? Of the body or the soul?' The saint poets have always worshipped self-improvement; they have never yearned for others' welfare! Even if we may derive the meaning that the poet asks for repeated service to the people in the *bhajan*, 'God's devotees do not ask for salvation, but for repeated birth', the same saint poet has sung :

'Every sacred place is in his body,
As he has obtained oneness with God.
Narasaiya says that without searching for essence,
The jewel, that is life, is purposeless.
No essence will be found without the search for the
body;

A man does not become learned by books alone.'

"The mention of the body merely means self-improvement. What I believe to be the correct thing is that one who has been pierced by the love of God, cannot think of anything else — not his own or others' happiness — he has only one aim, to know everything through knowing the one, to see Him who outshines the sun and the moon, to experience such joy that thousand heavenly pleasures are of no avail before it. Kabir has sung regarding this :

'When you find such an Excellent Master,
Attach yourself to Him;
The world became cool,
When our fire was quenched.'

"It is only when one quenches one's own fire, the whole world can be made cool. The peace of the world lies in one's own knowledge, — manifestation, self-experience, peace and self-realisation. What an elevating yet humble feeling that is? And so it cannot be denied that, that road is distinct unattainable and yet is the best. The argument in it is no doubt unbeaten, but even the experience therein is expounded and unbroken — about which it is better to be silent in face of inexperience."¹⁶

In the end let us see what he positively believed about his sickness :

"I have considered my sickness as God's blessing. Because I got a lot of time therein for prayers and self-knowledge. With due humility I can say that during the last

seven days, through the entire 24 hours of a day I have not even had an undesirable thought. It can be called a profound situation.¹ But whether that bloom of youth would remain for ever or not would be known only by the one who gives it. I am not at all sorry for this sickness because during this period my capacity for self-analysis has flowered and I got the opportunity to make excellent resolutions as well as to search for self-realisation. The only sadness is that I had to be served by others."¹⁷

FOOTNOTES :

1. CWMG, Vol. 14, p. 512
2. M.D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. II, p. 136
3. Ibid, p. 134
4. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadev Desai — Smritichitra*, p. 56
5. A zerox copy of a hand-written telegram
6. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadev Desai — Smritichitra*, p. 70
7. Ibid, p. 56
8. Narahari D. Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, p. 61
9. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadev Desai — Smritichitra*, pp. 57-59
10. Narahari D. Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, pp. 61-62
11. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadev Desai — Smritichitra*, p. 57
12. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 17, p. 531
13. Ibid. Vol. 21, p. 426
14. *Mahadevbhai-ji-Diary*, (Guj.) Vol. 16, pp. 36-37
15. Ibid. pp. 23 to 27 (Selected)
16. Ibid. pp. 28 to 30 (Selected)
17. Ibid. p. 31

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FEARLESS RIDER

The period from 1917 to 1921 was one of unprecedented awakening for the country and of plunging into the nationwide non-violent movement for Mahadev. Gandhiji made untiring efforts to awaken the sleeping nation and the nation also responded positively to his call for non-violence. In the history of our country's freedom Gandhiji's weapon of Satyagraha was used nationwide and the people experienced a new extraordinary vitality. During the thirty years of Gandhiji's non violent movement every decade saw an upsurge and the first upsurge was during this period. The country experienced fearlessness for the first time. The young and old, men, women and children one and all felt electrified. It was not surprising, therefore, that Mahadev shook off his sickness-born despair and prepared to plunge into the righteous struggle, freed from delusion and cured of fever, like Arjuna of Kurukshetra.

It is necessary to glance at some history to understand the background of Mahadev's attitude. It is not possible to mention all the happenings in the country. But to understand the action and inter-action of Gandhi and Mahadev and the country, it would be necessary to review the important ones. No doubt many political details will have to be left out. And it must be remembered that in most of the historical events Gandhiji played the main role, Mahadev merely supported the activities by all possible service.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report was made public in July 1918. Our leaders reacted in a number of different ways to the report which related to changes in the country's constitution. Gandhiji was of the opinion that the suggested reforms should be accepted; the war effort should be supported and a movement should be started if the country needed more reforms to be included in the Montford Report. At that time Gandhiji's premise was that of a loyal citizen of the British Empire. He wrote to Mohammed Ali Jinnah at that time

"... if every Home Rule League became a potent Recruiting Agency, whilst at the same time fighting for constitutional rights, we should ensure the passing of the Congress-League scheme, with only such modification, if any, as we may agree to."¹

But the Rowlatt Committee poured cold water over the hopes of almost all the leaders regarding India's obtaining 'some thing' (like Dominion Status) towards freedom after the war.

Under the joint auspices of the Bombay branch of the Home Rule League a public meeting was held on February 2, 1919 and Gandhiji's address was read, about the opposition to the suggested Rowlatt Act.

The punitive and restrictive terms of the Act included the following :

- Local Governments were empowered to order complaints to the Chief Justice regarding persons considered to be contravening the provision of the Act;
- The court could sit wherever it wished and had power to transfer to any location if thought necessary;
- The court could prohibit or restrict the publication or disclosure of its proceedings;
- The accused could be tried for offences other than that with which he/she was originally charged;
- The judgment of the Court was final and could not be overturned or altered by a High Court.

The Act goes on to state :

"Where, in the opinion of the Local Government, there are reasonable grounds for believing that any person is or has been actively concerned in any movement of the nature referred to above, it may give all or any of the following directions : That such person, (a) shall execute a bond for good conduct for a period not exceeding one year; (b) shall remain or reside in any area specified in the order; (c) shall notify his residence and any change of residence as ordered; (d) shall abstain from any act which, in the opinion of the Local Government, is calculated to disturb the public peace or is prejudicial to the public safety, (e) shall report himself to such police officer and at such periods as may be specified in the order."²

This law was to continue to be in force for one year only, but it could be brought into force again if the Government so desired.

"Whereas, in the opinion of the Local Government, any person has been or is concerned in such area in any offence of that kind, it may make in respect of such person any order authorised in Part II and may further order (a) the arrest of any such person without warrant; (b) the confinement of any such

person in such place and under such conditions and restrictions as it may specify; (c) the search of any place specified in the order which, in the opinion of the Local Government has been, is being or about to be used by any such person in such a manner as to endanger the public safety. The arrest of such a person may be effected at any place where he may be found by any police officer or any other officer to whom the order may be directed.

"An order for confinement of a person or the search of a place may be carried out by any officer to whom it may be directed and such officer may use reasonable means for enforcing the same. The person so arrested may, pending further orders, be committed in custody by the arresting officer for a period not exceeding fifteen days.

"An officer executing an order for the search of any place may seize and dispose off anything found in such place, which he has reason to believe is being used or is likely to be used for any purpose prejudicial to the public safety."³

The sections were included in the two Bills meant that certain orders could be passed on everyone and anyone from mere doubt and the Local Government was allowed to take these steps. Because of certain sections, it became the responsibility of the accused to prove his own innocence.

In the course of his address to protest against The Criminal Law Amendment Bill and The Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill (which was read out), Gandhiji said,

"... the Rowlatt Committee Report afforded not the slightest warrant for the proposed Bills, and that it was their duty to educate public opinion to oppose the Bills with patience and firm determination. . . . It was absurd to find on one side the enlargement of the powers of the public and on the other to put unbearable restraints on their powers. . . ."⁴

While the first bill was circulated for public opinion, the second became a law on March 18. Before the bill became a law Satyagraha against it was considered. On the 24th February, signatures were taken on the Satyagraha pledge in the Sabarmati Ashram. In the first Satyagraha pamphlet quotations from Henry David Thoreau's *On Civil Disobedience* were given. The working committee for the Satyagraha Committee was formed at Bombay in March. Gandhiji was appointed as the President.

On the other side, Dinshaw Wachha, Surendranath Bannerji, Shastri and Shafi gave a public statement against 'Passive Resistance'. In this way some leaders from the Moderate Group parted company with Gandhiji.

Gandhiji was constantly thinking about ways in which to oppose the Rowlatt Act. In the Tamil Nadu tour he suddenly hit upon a programme that could be taken up — to decide a definite date for a strike, a fast and a public sale of prohibited literature.

This was the first time in the country's history that a programme of countrywide fasting and strike was being organised for political reasons.

Sunday, the 30th of March, was fixed at first as the day of commencement. But it was changed afterwards to Sunday the 6th April, because it was feared that the whole country could not be intimated in time. But as the news of this change could not reach Delhi before the 30th, the Opposition Day was celebrated there on that date. A complete *hartal* (strike) was observed. A procession was to start at 4 p.m. which was to convert itself into a meeting later on. As such, a perfect *hartal* was without a precedent in the annals of Delhi, the white police officials were alarmed at the strength of the demonstration. The morning, however, passed off quietly but at 2 p.m. white soldiers, under one pretext or another, fired machine guns near the Delhi station on persons proceeding to form the procession. About a dozen persons were wounded and some killed. Some time later, firing was again resorted to at Chandni Chowk, near the Clock Tower, with about ten persons wounded as a result. All the same the procession did start under the leadership of Swami Shraddhanandji and the meeting also was held. About forty thousand persons attended it. When, after the meeting was over, Swami Shraddhanandji was arranging to let the people go home quietly, one Gurkha soldier pointed a rifle at his chest and said, "I'll pierce you." Nothing daunted, Swamiji replied, "Here I am. You can blaze away." Immediately eight or ten rifles were pointed straight at him. But as Swamiji stood his ground without flinching, the Gurkha soldiers felt ashamed of firing on an unarmed man and went away.

Gandhiji was very unhappy at reading the description of violence on the part of the people in Delhi firing, which appeared in the newspapers. Later on when he got the Delhi reports from the workers he realised that the police had made a mountain out of a mole-hill. He was happy at hearing about the people's courage. He said, "I am not sorry that 60 people died. It is indeed creditable that 40,000 people held a meeting at night and remained peaceful. I would not consider it too much of a suffering if 10,000 people go to jail. But if 10,000 people lose their lives, I will be deliriously happy. Because this is a fight for the search for freedom through sacrifice.⁵ We must be thankful to God that no injury was caused to the police in Delhi."⁵

The report of the celebrations of 6th April at Bombay has been given below in "Day to Day with Gandhi" as under :

"Sunday was celebrated magnificently in Bombay. Nearly two lakhs must have gathered on the beach. Their march to Madhavbag was so perfectly quiet and imposing as to astound the most sceptic. And this despite the fact that the mill-workers were not allowed by the mill-owners to join. But they were also not called upon to take a day off. The Muslims also rose wonderfully to the occasion. Bapu, Mrs Sarojini Naidu and Jamnadas went to the Masjid near Pil House and delivered soul stirring addresses. A resolution to take the Swadeshi pledge on the Ramnavami Day (the ninth of Chaitra, a lunar month, celebrated all over India as Sri Rama's birthday) was passed. Then there was another suggestion at the Masjid meeting to the effect that Hindus and Muslims must congregate at the Juma Masjid and take the holy vow that they will behave as united members of a family with such sincerity and purity of heart that everyone would be convinced that they were never separate even in a dream and can never be separated."⁶

On the 6th April there was a programme to sell prohibited literature, openly. Gandhiji had participated in it with his colleagues. Mahadev described it in a letter :

"Yesterday it was the limit over here (Bombay). In the evening there was a general public meeting. Bapu had ordered about five to six hundred books. During the meeting the police telephoned and sought the information as to what the meeting was about. The owner of that office replied without asking Bapu, 'I am busy, can't talk with you just yet.' Every one expected a police raid, some might have felt scared. Ansuyaben said that her hands had become ice cold. But the police did not come. Bapu had instructed before hand, 'I am your soldier, but in this struggle, I am your leader so you all should obey me. Keep quiet when the police come, I shall handle them. You carry out my orders.'

"At last, at seven in the evening all started selling. Bapu and Ansuyaben were in the car. The driver and Mathuradas were shouting - '*Hind Swaraj, Hind Swaraj*' and crowds of people came and purchased the books near V.T. and Jhaveri Bazaar. Bapu's stock finished thrice. Thrice he brought books from home. Money for the books was pouring in. Two persons gave Rs 100/- for each copy. One of them was a Muslim gentleman. There were hundreds who were giving a rupee each. I sold my books amongst loafers like myself at Churchgate station. It was a divine sight. Jamnadas would shout from the

car, *Hind Swaraj*, at the tram-line, at the theatres and also at the hotels. Banker, Umar Sobani, Sarojini Naidu and Horniman were moving from place to place to sell, shouting, '*Hind Swaraj* for two annas'. Various sign boards such as 'Plunder and take away prohibited literature', 'Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*', 'Buy and read and distribute', were put up on the cars. By eight o'clock thousands of copies must have reached as many homes in Bombay."⁷

Explaining the political importance of this incident Mahadev wrote, "By this people became fearless. Some of the cowards who were saved, because they did not participate would repent."

It seemed that the police persecution began in the capital, Delhi. It later on spread to other places such as Punjab and Gujarat. When Gandhiji got an invitation from the Punjab leaders, he left Bombay for the Punjab. Mahadev was naturally with him. The train was specially stopped at Kosikala near Palwal as it was approaching Delhi, and Gandhiji was prohibited from entering Delhi and the Punjab, and was asked to remain in the Bombay province. Gandhiji was arrested as he refused to obey the order. Mahadev had noted in his diary.

"He asked me to proceed alone to Delhi and inform Shraddhanandji, who was requested to keep the people quiet. He dictated his message quickly and I informed Vallabhbhai telegraphically . . . After meeting Shraddhanandji, I left Delhi for Bombay and called Maganlal and Narahari to Bombay for mutual consultations."⁸

On reaching Delhi, Mahadev gave out a statement to the press on April 9, 1919:

"Mahatma Gandhi on his way to Delhi was served with an order at Kosi not to enter the Punjab, not to enter Delhi and restrict himself to Bombay. The officer serving the order treated him most politely assuring him that it would be his painful duty to arrest him if he elected to disobey, but that there would be no ill will between them. Mr. Gandhi smilingly said, he must elect to disobey as it was his duty and that the officer ought also to do what was his duty. In the few minutes that were left to us, he dictated the following message, laying special emphasis on his oral message to me, as in the written message that 'none should resent his arrest or do anything tainted with untruth or violence which were sure to damn the sacred cause'. "⁹

From a personal letter written by Mahadev it seemed that Gandhiji told him before his arrest that he was being named as his (Gandhiji's) heir. These words were uttered in confidence. Mahadev

wrote about this in his letter "I have never considered myself fit enough for that status." He wrote further as if repeating a *jeevan-mantra*, "My desire is to think of Hanuman as my ideal and swim through life by devotion and surrender."¹⁰

* * *

As mentioned in this incident, Mahadev had more than once enthroned Gandhiji in the place of Ram. He had felt constrained even to place himself as Tulsidas. Was it that he considered Gandhiji an incarnation of God? To get an answer to this, one must read Mahadev's preface 'My Submission' in the translation of Gandhiji's *Anāśaktiyoga The Gita According to Gandhi*. The passages on 'Incarnation' clarify its philosophical premise.

Considering many of his actions and statements in relation to Gandhiji one tends to think that Mahadev did consider Gandhiji to be an incarnation. Such a belief in Hindu tradition is neither unknown nor considered to be one which should be concealed.

Mahadev considered himself blessed in his service to Gandhiji. When a difference of opinion arose between the two, assuming the mistake was on his part he tried to find the same. If he was not able to find his mistake or was unable to correct it he thought he did not deserve Gandhiji. He then prepared himself even to distance himself from Gandhiji to atone for his mistake. He was his devotee but not blindly so. Mahadev's life could be called an unbroken poem of devotion. But he had not composed any *bhajan* in praise of his master. He considered Gandhiji to be a *sadhak* (one who consistently works for spiritual development) — much more advanced than his humble self — not a demigod or a seer. He never believed in Gandhiji's infallibility, neither did he believe that he had extraordinary powers of performing miracles. He did believe that Gandhiji had a divine spark much greater than that found in the common man. But he firmly believed that Gandhiji had a body which would develop according to natural rules and he (Mahadev) was always careful to see that Gandhiji was properly cared for.

Mahadev believed that life was a constant evolutionary universal process enveloping the whole world on one side and every individual on the other. To a greater or lesser extent, this was a movement from imperfection to perfection and from untruth to truth. He considered one as an incarnation who reduced himself to almost a zero and reached the climax of selfless action and detachment. He also believed that the reason to consider anyone an incarnation is to inculcate his merits in oneself. And that is why Mahadev's constant effort was to reduce himself to a zero and achieve perfection through detached effort. His penance for perfection on one side was developing merits in himself, while on the other it was to cover the

entire horizon through service and crossing all the boundaries in society of caste, language, religion and nation. He perceived that perfection in self-surrender. He had considered his service to Gandhiji as a medium of pilgrimage from the finite to the infinite. The striving for perfection and the effort for reducing oneself to zero merged into each other in that service. Was not the moment of the last breath he drew at Poona's Agakhan Palace on 15th August 1942, one which merged the personal consciousness into the universal one?

Correspondence between Narahari and Mahadev in 1919 is significant in this context. Narahari gave report of a talk with one Mr. Majmudar thus :

"He started praising Bapu. He began by saying Gandhi was obstinate since his childhood. And he immediately acted if he thought about anything . . . Since his childhood that man had some divine strength. Even to-day because of his intuitive inspiration he is successful in what he does in spite of the fact that he has little knowledge, quite an amount of egoism and perfect ignorance of history. One who does not know him might think that he is scheming. But he is not at all scheming. When he undertakes any work he deliberates on the methods of doing it. There is no one more truthful. But along with truth he has a lot of ego. Only what he says is the truth. Truth is there in the world since ages and now he says, 'What I found is the truth.' How absurd it is to tell anyone and everyone that what I believe is the truth? I say it is like this, if you dislike it we both go our own ways. But that is his beauty. He succeeds because of that. And his strength lies in the fact that he is a patron of the poor and the distressed. He is the one who goes to their huts and spreads compassion. India is unhappy at present and so worships this saviour. Not only India, but if he goes to-day to Egypt, people will shout, 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi'. I would go to this extent that if any body could comfort Germany and Russia, it is Gandhi. Mind you, remember it, I am forecasting. . . . We went to England together. He waited for me for some time. He went on climbing and I just sat doing nothing but eat. To-day I am not fit enough even to sit at his feet. He is a real Mahatma. He is incarnated. Better than Jesus Christ. I am afraid to come to the Ashram. I feel that I may pollute it with my sin. I cannot look at him. I feel too proud to touch his feet. Those who do not worship him to-day are wasting their lives. It is our good fortune that we are his contemporaries. He told me to serve well now. . . . Oh! I forgot one thing. He said that he was going to die at the blow

of an Indian. All prophets have died similarly. . . . Some one from amongst us will shoot him and a new India would emerge from it. This talk now is heart-rending. It is all very well that Majmudar has said this, but you are also writing the same thing . . . whatever God wills will happen. We can only work with full sincerity."¹¹

A portion from Mahadev's reply

"Majmudar's analysis is excellent. It is very correct. The ego that he is talking about is not the common ego, but a subtle ego which is felt only when you search deeply and intensely for it. It may be that, that ego is necessary for spiritual life. I see that there is an evolution taking place in Bapu every minute. And every minute he becomes more and more venerable. And yet he still has to achieve perfection. It is not that I consider Bapu lower than someone else, whom I believe to be perfect. I wonder as to how could the incarnations that have appeared so far could have been superior to Bapu? When you must have been writing this letter, I was telling Panditji's ape-like secretary that it is our good fortune to have come into contact with such a God-like-person."¹¹

* * *

Let the story of the Gandhi-Mahadev's duct continue. A few interesting excerpts from Gandhiji's message "to my fellow countrymen" hastily dictated on the train to Mahadev after the order for his arrest was served, are given here :

"I had to . . . disregard the order which I have done and I shall presently find myself a free man. My body will be taken by them into their custody. It was galling to me to remain outside whilst the Rowlatt legislation disfigured the Statute-book. . . . It now remains for you to do your duty which is clearly stated in the Satyagraha Pledge. . . . I hope there will be no resentment about my arrest. The departure from truth by a hair's breadth or violence committed against anybody, whether Englishman or Indian, will surely damn the great cause the Satyagrahis are handling. I hope the Hindu Muslim unity which seems now to have taken a firm hold of the people, will become a reality. . . .

"Give attention to the Swadeshi Vow. As your ideas of Satyagraha become matured, Hindu Muslim unity and Swadeshi will become part of Satyagraha.

". . . Finally, it is my firm belief that we shall obtain salvation only through self suffering and not by Reforms dropping on us from England, no matter how unstintingly they may be granted."¹²

Gandhiji was brought to Bombay from Palwal and released. He wanted to break the law and go to the Punjab, but on hearing the news about outbreak of riots in Bombay, he stayed over there to check them. He announced that he would wind up the struggle if violence continued.

He went to Ahmedabad having heard about the riots breaking out there on the twelfth April 1919. A meeting was held on the 14th in the Ashram and Gandhiji announced his decision to go on a fast to atone for the violence.

He met the Commissioners, both in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Imam Saheb, Vinoba, Narahari and other Ashramites had gone from house to house in Ahmedabad to establish peace. Pamphlets advocating peace were published from both the places. From Valsad station Mahadev congratulated Maganlalbhai, Manager of the Ashram thus :

'I had tears of joy when I read about the part our Ashram brethren played. I see that Imam Saheb is moving about like a brave warrior. Please convey my special salutations to him. As an elder member you must be enjoying the sight of the youngsters bravely fighting in the battle. I am keen to know more about the valour displayed by the women.'¹³

In short this was the beginning of the 'Peace Army' in India. Mahadev along with Gandhiji performed almost all the tasks that a Peace Army performs, during and after the riots at Bombay. They are -

Warning the people . To go amongst the people, make an effort to stop violence and pillage, to visit the homes and explain to the people;

With the Government Officers : To conduct negotiations and evaluate the Government's stand in the matter, and clarify the people's stand to the officers, to find out ways of achieving and maintaining peace, to be alert to see that the officers and the police did not start oppression in the name of law and order;

To give out statements for the public : To let the people realise that even those citizens that are sitting quietly at home were responsible for the violence; to issue pamphlets explaining the concept of peace; to stop rumours by publicising the facts after looking into their validity, to allow fasts by leaders as atonement and participation by the people therein only for a day.

There was a discussion in a meeting of Satyagrahi workers at Madras about the strategy of the movement. Mahadev took notes of the programme. At the end he said, "We have to consider ourselves

not as a destructive army but a constructive army and if necessary as a self sacrificing army " This thought which Mahadev put forward as far back as in March 1919 was the seed sprouted from a profound thought and it clarified his mode of work and its final aim.

Mahadev had accompanied Gandhiji when he went to meet the Commissioners. He noted down the entire talk with the Commissioner at Bombay Those notes reveal the arrogant attitude of Government officials, in giving advice on ethics to the citizens and Gandhiji's humble yet unflinching attitude in face of insults. The Commissioner used very bad and abusive language about the leaders supporting Gandhiji Gandhiji did not accept any of it and repeatedly said that he was not interested in any one's calumny. He gave his opinion about those people in very clear words. Mahadev displayed his ingenuity in those notes through repeated dialogues . In the dialogues he emphasised the point of not accepting baseless talks about his colleagues, as well as prevented any division among workers by disallowing doubts to enter their minds To-day in absence of Gandhiji and his colleagues of the time, Mahadev has left an example of leadership through those notes.

Gandhiji was trying to quell riots at Ahmedabad while the Punjab was afire There was firing at Lahore At a couple of places in the Punjab the rail tracks were dislocated On the 13th April, an English Officer, named Dyer, surrounded the closed area of Jallianwala Bagh, placed soldiers with rifles at the gate and went on shooting mercilessly with machine guns at the crowd without giving them a chance to disperse* A total of 1600 rounds were fired on a crowd of about 20,000 people. The shooting stopped only when there was no ammunition left. In one of the lanes of Amritsar the local people attacked Miss Sherwood, an English nun To avenge that incident, any one crossing that lane was ordered by the military to crawl on his stomach. At various places in the Punjab wooden platforms were erected for flogging and people were stripped naked and flogged in the public. In Amritsar the Army Commission conducted 218 cases, out of these two hundred and eighteen cases 51 people were sentenced to death, 48 to life imprisonment and the rest were incarcerated as follows, 2 for 10 years, 79 for 7 years, 10 for 5 years, 13 for 3 years and 11 for a shorter period During the inquiry conducted later the officers did not show any repentance for what they did but went further to say that they would have been harsher had they got the opportunity More than 400 people died and more than a 1,000 were injured in the Jallianwala Bagh firing Next day the whole Punjab was under Martial Law At many points telegraph wires were cut Many leaders were extermed from the Punjab. On the

18th April Gandhiji announced the temporary suspension of the non-co-operation movement.

In Bombay, Mr Horniman, the Editor of *The Bombay Chronicle* was ordered to leave India on account of the nationalistic leanings of that newspaper. There was a strike observed against that order.

In the month of May there was a demand to remove Martial Law from the Punjab and to conduct a complete inquiry about the events which took place there. Sir Michael O'Dwyer was the Governor of the Punjab. He was replaced by Sir Edward Macleg. The whole world was tremendously shocked by the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy. The unholy methods of the British Empire were revealed to the world. Poet Rabindranath Tagore announced his decision to return his title of Knighthood. There was a discussion about the Jallianwala Bagh in the House of Lords. There it was only mentioned that 'Dyer', who was responsible for the tragedy, 'committed a mistake in his calculation'. He did not incur any punishment. He himself arrogantly remarked, "I did whatever I did with full understanding."

Except for the railway yards, the Martial Law was withdrawn from the whole of Punjab in the month of June. Gandhiji gave a limit upto the month of July for the withdrawal of The Rowlatt Act and an inquiry into the Punjab happenings, or else he would start Satyagraha. He also demanded that the sentence passed by the Military Court be held in abeyance till the inquiry was over. The Government did not agree. The Congress Committee met at Calcutta in July and the idea of re-starting Satyagraha was dropped for the time being. During this period Swadeshi stores selling various commodities opened at many places. An Inquiry Commission under the leadership of Lord Hunter was appointed to inquire into the incidents of violence and police oppression in places such as Punjab and Gujarat. The Government of India advised the provincial Governments of Bombay, Madras and others to withdraw all prohibitory orders (like those of the ban on entering the Punjab) against Gandhiji.

Before the end of First World War, the problem of Khilafat in Turkey came up which agitated the Indian Muslims. Turkey's Sultan was called a Khalif. The whole Muslim world considered him a religious head. The British Government had announced that they would not allow any harm to befall Turkey's Sultan after the war, in spite of his favouring the Germans. This was done with a view to keeping the Indian Muslims on their side during the war. At about the same time, in the talks that the British were conducting with other friendly nations, a plan was being formulated to divide Turkey

and share it. This was known in Europe. But it had not been known in India due to strict censorship. When it was known, the Muslims felt very hurt. They had an acute feeling of injustice and betrayal. Gandhiji put this before the Viceroy when he went to the War Council meeting. Gandhiji believed him, when the Viceroy put forth the argument that this was only a piece of news in the papers — it should not be believed till it was officially announced by the Government. Gandhiji made the Khilafat problem his own, as he felt that he must help his own countrymen, when they — the Muslims — were offended in the matter. In November 1919, whilst speaking in a meeting of Ulemas, it struck him that injustice could be countered by non-co-operation.

The Hunter Committee's Report was released on 28th May of the same year. The Committee was unanimous in the finding that on account of the non-co operation movement the attitude towards law and order had become a bit lax, but on all other counts the opinions of the British members and the Indian members were totally different. The Indian members said unequivocally that the declaration of Martial Law by the Government mistaking hooliganism for revolt was wrong and the consequent ruthless oppression was inhuman and an insult to the Indian people. In spite of this Report, (and the Indian members' opinion) the Government of India had whitewashed the reality. The Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer was praised in that Report for handling the situation with strength and courage.

Three causes combined to make the country's non-co-operation movement necessary. They were the Khilafat; oppression in the Punjab, and since such injustice was bound to continue till freedom was gained, freedom became the third cause. A committee of inquiry into the Punjab oppression was appointed; Gandhiji played a leading role in that. When the Hunter Committee came to Ahmedabad, its members examined Gandhiji in detail. Report of the full inquiry had filled many pages of Mahadev's diary. The answers that Gandhiji gave during the inquiry clearly indicate his high level of understanding in comparison to other witnesses.

Mr Hunter's questions mainly related to the principle of Satyagraha. Here is an excerpt :

Q Mr Gandhi, we have been informed that you are the author of the Satyagraha movement.

A. : Yes Sir

Q I would like you to give us an explanation of what the movement is.

A. : It is a movement intended to replace methods of violence. It is a movement based entirely on truth. It is, as I

have conceived it, an extension of the domestic law on the political field, and my own experience has led me to the conclusion that, that movement and that movement alone can rid India of the possibilities of violence for the redress of her grievances.

Q. : Was it your intention to enlist as many Satyagrahis as possible ?

A. : Yes, consistently with the carrying on of the movement in a proper way. If I found a million men capable of adhering to truth and non-violence, I would certainly be glad to have the million men.

Q. Is not your movement antagonistic to Government ?

A. : Not in my opinion. This is not the spirit in which the movement has been conceived. . . .

Q. . Look at it from the point of view of Government, Mr. Gandhi. If you are the Government yourself what would you say to a public movement started to disobey your laws ?

A. : If I was in charge of the Government and a body of men, who were determined to find out the truth, refused to obey certain laws. . . . I would consider that they were the best constitutionalists and welcome them. . . . The Satyagrahi gives to the opponent the same right that he reserves for himself

Q. : . . . don't you think this Satyagraha is a rather dangerous campaign ?

A. I don't. And if you conceive the campaign as designed to rid the country of the school of violence you will agree that the campaign is rather helpful than dangerous."¹⁴

Lord Hunter and other members then went to see the Ashram

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mahadev had been sick for about five months during the end of 1919 and the beginning of 1920. During this period, Krishnadas, a very sincere person from Bengal, worked as Gandhiji's Secretary. Gandhiji had moved about visiting quite a few places in the country during this time, explaining about matters such as Khilafat, non-co-operation and the Punjab oppression. He had completed the people's inquiry into the Punjab repression.

The non-co-operation movement was going to start on the first of August. Lokmanya Tilak died the previous night. The situation was as if he had handed over his fight for freedom to Gandhiji. Gandhiji visited Madras in the same month and took a pledge on the last day of August to wear Khadi for the rest of his life.

On a lighter note a description of the tour has been given here. Mahadev wrote :

"We have just returned from the meeting. It is 10 p.m. We have not yet broken our fast. Even when we break it God knows what we would get to eat! There would be pebbles in the rice . . . Recently I have to take care of more things and I am becoming forgetful. Bapu gets a variety of garlands. In Rampur nearly fifty to sixty garlands of silver thread had been given. I left all of them there. In Lucknow Maulana Abdul Bari garlanded him with one with a golden thread, worth about ten to fifteen rupees. It was such that could not be left back, but I forgot to bring it from Bombay. How could these things be accommodated in a mendicant's knapsack? Someone had given a silver scent-holder. I kept it carefully. But it seemed to have been stolen. This area is a Muslim area. The entire Shamiana was built with roses . . . nearly five pounds of them. I wish I had the temerity to take out the essence of these flowers . . . The bouquets and garlands of Tanjore were a bit queer. One was made only of the inside of a flower. This required a lot of artistic talent, and it is worth bringing to show it to the children, but how should I bring it? One bouquet was quite peculiar. Firstly, there were three lines in succession — one bigger than the other — of cloves, then there was a longer string of pearls — not real ones of course, or else I would not have accepted it, then one line of cardemoms, then again a line of cloves and lastly there was a nutmeg stuck in a mace instead of a central flower and a running deer attached with a wire. I felt like bringing this also, but as I have given a vivid description, it will be all right if I do not bring it. Moreover, the things in that bouquet would be helpful after a meal of rice full of stones.

"There are some Gujaratis in Tanjore. As they went there a long time ago, they try speaking broken Gujarati. And still they honoured Bapu as a Gujarati, because they have that much pride left as Gujaratis. They gave two shawls with borders embroidered with silver thread. So that burden is added to another one to-day. The people here gave the citation in a silver *pandan*. I do not eat *pan*. But I think there would be nothing wrong if I cultivated the habit, if only to preserve this box. Don't you think so? . . . But now I have been talking like one who had nothing to do. . . ."15

* * *

Gandhiji, the loyal citizen of the British Empire turned to non-co-operation with the British Government for various reasons. They were, the Hunter Committee's Report, the fact that officers like Dyer who committed terrible repression in Jallianwala Bagh getting away

without any punishment with a mere remark of 'an error of judgment', the collection of funds in England for such officers, and giving India the Black Act — Rowlatt Act. After the war Government started curbing freedom instead of bringing in some constitutional reforms. The Indian National Congress decided to follow Gandhiji's path by passing resolutions for non-co operation in the session held first at Calcutta and then at Nagpur. The excellent reports of the exciting happenings of this period are there in the first and second volumes of "Day to Day with Gandhi" (English Translation of Mahadevbhai's Diary). In the initial stages, stalwarts such as Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru opposed the programme of non-co-operation. But in a short time they recognised the strength latent in the programme to awaken the people and bring them together, and they co-operated with Gandhiji. The young leadership of the Congress, such as Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal, were all eager to adopt the non co-operation programme. Dinshaw Wachha, Annie Besant, Surendranath Bannerjee, N. C. Kelkar and other moderates, who did not join the national programme of non-co-operation were discarded from the movement. Of course, the Government rewarded them with various seats of honour and titles. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was made a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Lord Sinha became the Governor of Bihar, Surendranath Bannerjee got the title of 'Sir'.

After the Nagpur Congress Gandhiji started to mould the Congress into a more broad-based organisation. The National Congress demarcated the provinces on the basis of language and not on that of the British Administration. A large number of primary members were inducted in the Congress. Many of the Congress meetings as well as the work concerning them were conducted in the respective provincial language or Hindi.

After Tilak's death it was decided to collect funds in his memory called the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Along with that, programmes for the registration of primary members for the Congress, and introducing *charkhas* (spinning wheels) in villages and towns, were taken up. Because of these three programmes, for the first time in its history, the Congress became an institution of the common man rather than that of the elite. In this programme of mixing with and becoming one with the people, Mahadev was there along with Gandhiji. Amongst the young leaders of the Congress, Mahadev's relationship with Vallabhbhai, built at Kheda, became closer and remained so for his whole life. It was Mahadev who had introduced Rajagopalachari to Gandhiji. That relationship was one of a high cultural level. Rajaji's cultured nature prevented Mahadev from continuing his habit of taking snuff and he had thrown away his

snuff box from a railway train. Mahadev was to come closer to Jawaharlal later in Allahabad and Lucknow prisons. Apart from his connection with the leaders, he continued to be among the people.

Mahadev was used to writing when he came to Gandhiji, but he was not used to speaking in public. For the first few years he used to harbour a stage-fright. In *Madhpudo*, a hand-written bi-monthly of the Rashtriya Vidya Mandir of Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, Mahadev has described his experience of speaking in public. Once he was going to Surat from Dihen. A leader of a boys' group at Rander recognised him and allowed him to go only after extracting a promise from him to speak in a meeting at Rander, on his way back. Later on he became a good speaker. He had the experience of explaining Gandhiji's thoughts in a pleasant way at Ahmedabad and Kheda. During his travel throughout the country, such incidents were frequent. But this incident was the first one for Mahadev. Oh yes! During student days he had spoken about giving up alcoholic drinks at Hajira with Chhotubhai, but that was, as already mentioned, from behind the screen. It was the first time that he was speaking before the public at Rander. Tilak Swaraj Fund came to his aid. He wrote:

"I talked at random for about twenty to twenty-five minutes and to avoid being unhappy about this talk I resorted to begging like Shaukatali and Gandhiji. I ventured to ask for contribution to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. I felt relieved when seventy two rupees and two annas were collected in half an hour."

Later on he became accustomed to addressing public meetings. If it was Gandhiji's day of silence, Mahadev used to read out to large audiences, his (Gandhiji's) speech dictated to him whilst spinning or resting with a mud poultice on his stomach.

Since the days of Kheda Satyagraha, one could find in the notes of the C.I.D. — Gandhi and his colleague's public activities. In these, as well as in national newspapers, it is noted that Mahadev had read Gandhiji's speech. And yet in letters during the end of 1920 and even the beginning of 1921 Mahadev described his stage-fright. In a couple of places even in that description, Mahadev found only merit in Gandhiji. He wrote, "Bapu is thus training me for speaking in public but my stage fright has not left me."

In the field of writing, Mahadev was hardly ever embarrassed. Whenever Gandhiji had conducted some public activity either in India, or abroad, he always brought out a thought-provoking periodical. *Young India*, *Navajvan* and *Harijan* were the periodicals he edited on this very basis. Mahadev constantly wrote in these periodicals from their very inception till August 1942.

It was Mahadev's work to discuss matters independently with people, over and above keeping a note of Gandhiji's activities. Personal tasks such as washing clothes, sweeping up places, filling up the water-pot, also came within his purview. Not only this but he had to look after Gandhiji's correspondence, as well as to fill up the columns of *Young India* or *Navajivan* with interesting description of Gandhiji's tours, with different articles or the same article written in both the languages. If the same type of letter had to be written to more than one person, he would make a suggestion to pass on the letter to the next person. He wrote, "There is a lot of correspondence. It would be very convenient if you talk to Vallabhbhai. It becomes difficult to write to two places."¹⁷

Many of the letters give a glimpse of the busy life Mahadev led at that time. But even when he had written swiftly between two programmes, his and Gandhiji's personalities got full exposition. An instance from a letter written to Narahari on 7th March 1919 from Delhi, follows :

"Yesterday we went to Rampur. Met Shaukatali. I would have to give up my secretary's job if I started describing his huge, giant-like body, his dazzling lustre, his child-like simplicity and affection. An agreement had been reached with him for Satyagraha. He had agreed with all points, and we would have to include his struggle in that for the Rowlatt Bill.

"Not only Bapu but even I am tired after two nights' journey. And yet there is a heap of work which has to be done. Telegrams came by dozens, and there are a lot of interviews. I am really fed up and have been praying to God that Bapu may be protected.

"To-day Bapu had gone to meet Sir James Dubole, regarding Mohammadali and Shaukatali. He had gone since four o'clock. It is quarter past six now. He has not yet come. The result is likely to be similar to that of the interview with the Viceroy. 'Met, embraced, and separated after saying *Alekum Salaam*', 'I will go my way, you go yours'. The Viceroy asked Bapu, 'Do you want anarchy in the country?' Bapu said, 'I don't want it. You are inviting it. That could be the only result of the Bills.' He told Bapu, 'What can you alone do?' Bapu said, 'The moral strength of one man is sufficient to bend an Empire.' The Viceroy laughed and said, 'Mr Gandhi, you are impractical.' Bapu said, 'That may be, but I believe that I am the most practical of men on earth.'

"The Viceroy laughed again and said, 'Do you want the Reforms or not? If you offer Satyagraha against the Bills, you won't get the Reforms.' Bapu said in reply to this, 'The price is

too heavy. The Government may as well keep the Reforms to themselves. We don't want them.' I have the gist of the talks.

I must finish soon . . . A meeting had been arranged as soon as he came. We had to go there. Bapu was exhausted after the tumultuous and tiring welcome given by the people of Rampur. So to-day he had got a short speech written in Hindi. I have kept a copy. Have also kept an English version ready for the Associated Press and before he comes and drags me away, I am writing this letter. I would be reading the speech in the meeting. And we would slip away according to our arrangement when it is over."¹⁸

Mahadev was a devotee. He daily discovered new virtues in Bapu. He never failed to describe them in his letters. He wrote in a letter written in a mood of thankfulness

"As I have already said, Bapu is in his full form. He daily works for about fourteen to fifteen hours and yet does not seem to get tired. It is obvious that his hope of success is giving him strength. Two to three lectures a day, writing a number of important letters, sending telegrams, press messages, having discussions with a number of people, steadying many indecisive souls, resolving doubts of many minds, getting work done from a number of diplomats and politicians, all these things are continuously going on. One is repeatedly reminded of the dexterity in work of Lord Krishna. And I feel proud that I have the good fortune of being with him and serving him. It is difficult to believe that really and truly I have that good fortune. I do not deserve it at all.

"Should I relate the work accomplished today till four in the afternoon when we left the house? He sent a telegram, scolding everyone at Calcutta, at five o'clock in the morning. He had an interview with Sir Pattani in the morning from six to eight, he sent a message to Montagu with him. There was unprecedented vigour at the time of giving the message — his language was so terse that it felt as if he was giving a lecture — he was breathing fire at every word. Then he gave an hour's sermon to Jamnadas. Then a sermon to Umar Sobhani as to how to tackle the Hindu Muslim problem. He wrote one article for publication on the vow of *swadeshi*. One on Hindu-Muslim unity. He translated the Satyagraha Pledge, during which there was a talk between a brother and a sister, when he talked with Baliben. Then he gave a sermon on how to spend money for good purpose to many people who had come to give him money. A quick, five-minute visit to Anandshankerbhai who is on his death-bed, on the way to the station. At the station he

gave suggestions to Satyagrahis for action during difficulties, till the train left. And then he got the letter on *swadeshi* for the public, translated into English till Palghar. I have been looking into it just now and would post it at Navsari at six o'clock in the evening. . . . (Gandhiji) is sleeping soundly. Please excuse the handwriting as the letter was written in the train. As I had not poured out my heart to you for a long time past, I felt like writing and so I did."¹⁹

Gandhiji, who had come out on a fearless ride of the non-co-operation movement, had to compete with and face leaders, older than him in age, as well as better known than himself. Mahadev wrote in a letter :

"We put up with Motilal Nehru at Allahabad. I had never seen a more extravagant family. They live with a greater pomp than that of a king. They must be spending about a lakh of rupees every year. Bapu is going to be charged in future as a 'Corruptor of youth', the same charge that Socrates faced. Jawaharlal, Motilal's son, has signed the non-co-operation pledge. It is against the father's wishes. So Bapu was soothing the old couple. The father said, 'My only son, a barrister and scholar, has been brought up in extreme luxury. He rides the best horses. How would he be able to stand the sufferings of non-co-operation?' Bapu said, 'Would you like to see your son riding horses, or would you like to see him challenging a formidable Government as a leader of thousands of men? You pamper your son, but could you predict what will happen to-morrow? If you keep him in velvet mattresses, he would become like a soft rag!' He told his mother, 'Are you not ashamed to be so oppressive towards your thirty years old son?' I would be terribly ashamed. I considered my sons as my friends from the time they were sixteen. When are we going to free ourselves from the family folds? To-day our mothers give birth to creatures, not to sons."²⁰ That lady was quite embarrassed. And did not thereafter meet him."

When he went to Panditji's (Madan Mohan Malaviya) place, he gave a lecture to his wife :

"You must make a 'man' out of Panditji. Why are you telling me to care for my health? Panditji does not care for his health — and so he is not strong.' So the lady said, 'He is talking of going to England. I do not like it at all.' Bapu said, 'Yes, you are right, I agree with you cent per cent. There is no need, whatsoever, for him to go there. You must stop him. He is not needed there at all. And at present he must participate in this fierce struggle. We are likely to lose face. I would ask you

to sacrifice your sons in this ' 'Yes Sir, what you have said is correct. Now I too feel stronger, and mother would allow us to join Satyagraha.' "21

Such was the fun and frolic going on. When Gandhiji was trying to persuade Motilal and his wife to allow Jawaharlal to join the non-co-operation movement Mahadev had cast a spell on Jawaharlal's younger sister, Krishna. She said :

"It was during these days that I decided to give up eating meat I was very fond of it and one day Mahadevbhai Desai (Gandhiji's Secretary) saw me having my lunch. He was quite upset at the sight of the different kinds of meat before me and there and then gave me a long sermon on becoming a vegetarian I was not easily won over, but Mahadevbhai persisted day after day, whenever he caught sight of me. I gave it up in the midst of all wedding festivities, much to the distress of everyone except my mother. She was overjoyed. She disliked meat and would never touch it of her own free will During her illness she was forced to take soups or meat in some form or other For three years I did not touch any meat, though I often longed for it. Then I went one Christmas to spend a week or so with some cousins Seeing them all eat meat was too great a temptation and I succumbed."22

Let us note down a funny incident referred to in Mahadev's letter written after 7th March. He wrote :

"In Rampur we put up at Shaukatali's place. I have already described him. Huge, fat, like the Kutub Minar. When he embraced me at the station I really felt that he would crush me to a pulp, but he was innocent and pure like a child and very merry He had written to the Nawab to send a goat for Bapu He sent, not one, not two but eighteen goats and Shaukatali had kept a maund of milk Would it not look bad if the Nawab sent anything less than eighteen goats ?"23

In the initial stages there was an unprecedented tide of people on account of the non-co-operation movement. Within four years of Mahadev's joining Gandhiji, he saw him (Gandhiji) controlling the country's entire politics Mahadev was not attracted by Gandhiji's fame. He was attracted by his virtues and so he was not affected by the ebb and tide of the people's movement He had surrendered himself to an individual who was steadily progressing towards self-purification and the country's freedom. Gandhiji was taking in his stride at once happiness and pain, advantage and disadvantage, success and failure Mahadev was a constant witness to this He was pained if anybody spoke ill of Gandhiji He was worried about

people's ignorance rather than of success or failure. The description of people's enthusiasm on the 6th April at Bombay has already been given. The atmosphere of that city had entirely changed on the last day of the month on account of many happenings such as, Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy, Gandhiji's arrest; riots in Bombay, Gujarat, Punjab, Delhi and consequent police oppression; suspension of the movement for a short time, and Gandhiji's fast. Mahadev wrote to Narahari :

"The condition here is very grave. The crowds that were shouting *Gandhiji jai* a few days ago, are showering abuses. Not a single day passes without letters full of abuses. The movement has stopped (has been postponed). Horniman has gone; and it seems as if only a dog has died. 'Mind you, your condition would not become like that of Mrs. Besant or Dinshaw Wacha! The Government has got a free police officer in Gandhi, after all he is a Bania! He is suppressed by the Government to such an extent that even meetings are not allowed. We are not indebted to his ancestors. We are not Gandhi's slaves just as we are not the Government's slaves! We will strike, conduct meetings, shout slogans!' These are some of the echoes of the misled crowds. Bapu's heart is breaking. And yet he does not hesitate to spend hours and hours together in persuading stupid people. So at present a fight is going on against darkness and other dark forces. Your compassionate feelings are enough to understand the agonies I am going through. I sometimes feel that our frenzied crowds would take Bapu's life — and he would prove the victory of his truth and duty by sacrificing his own life."²⁴

But this despair in the hearts of the Bombay public was also short-lived. In 1921 a wave of non co operation movement engulfed the whole country and Bombay played a leading role in it.

The non-co operation movement opened a unique page in the history of the country's fight for freedom. In the first place it made men out of dust by teaching the country a lesson in the significance of time. It encouraged youngsters to tread the path of sacrifice, even against the wishes of their fathers. The fear of jail was banished from the minds of the educated. The fear of the British Government became less because of the movement. If we look back, we see that whenever there was a call for movements for sacrifice (1921, 1931, 1942) the country got a new group of workers. These workers gave more importance to service to society rather than their self-interest and consequently the country was blessed with unprecedented awakening and enthusiasm.

In spite of being Gandhiji's friend, cook, waterman and secretary, Mahadev's own contribution to the non-co-operation movement was that of a journalist. More about this later.

FOOTNOTES :

1. Mahadev Desai, "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. I, p. 169
2. CWMG, Vol. 15, pp. 111 to 115 (Selected)
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. p. 83
5. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. II, pp. 19-20
6. Ibid. pp. 20-22
7. From a letter to Narahari Parikh written on 7-4-1919 — Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya.
8. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. II, p. 25
9. CWMG, Vol. 15, p. 207
10. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa Mahadev Desai - Smritichitra*, p. 51
11. From the correspondence — Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya
12. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. II, p. 26 (selected)
13. From the correspondence — Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya
14. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. II, pp 96-100 (selected)
15. From the correspondence — Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
16. Vajubhai Shah, *Sarve Shubhopama Yogya Mahadevbhai*, p. 37
17. From correspondence — Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Krishna Hutheesingh, *With No Regrets*, p. 16
23. From correspondence — Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
24. Ibid

CHAPTER XIX

'I UNFOLD THE POWER OF LOVE'

The Ashrams were the manifestations of Gandhiji's spiritual activities, while the periodicals signified his external activities. The balance he had struck between the inner and outer aspects of his personality were evident in the above two fields as well. His experiments regarding self purification and development of virtues were carried on in the Ashram, whereas his ideas about society, the nation and the world, got expression in the periodicals. And yet there was not a single Ashram of his, either in India or Africa, where the development of the workers and the questions of the nation were not smoothly intermingled, neither was there any periodical of his in which one did not find self-examination. Thus in both the fields, internal and external, the identity of each had merged into the other.

On entering the field of social work, Gandhiji needed a medium through which he could put his thoughts and programmes before the public. He used to meet this requirement by letters to the editors or statements in the newspapers. But he felt the need of a periodical as the activities increased. *Indian Opinion* was the result of this need, the articles of which are useful even after eighty years, today, for the study of non-violence. The following words indicate the oneness of his internal and external thoughts. He said :

"So long as it was under my control, the changes in the journal were indicative of changes in my life. . . I cannot recall a word set down without thought or deliberation . . . Indeed, the journal became for me a training in self restraint, and for friends a medium through which to keep in touch with my thoughts . . . Satyagraha would probably have been impossible without *Indian Opinion* "1

* * *

Gandhiji did not start any periodical on his arrival in India. He was not a journalist by profession. But situations so demanded that

he had to accept journalism as one of the media, through which to function.

He began by giving a letter, statement or an article in the current newspapers. *The Bombay Chronicle* was considered a powerful medium for the national movement. Its editor, Benjamin Guy Horniman, an Englishman, was India's supporter. He and his paper were sympathetic towards the Home Rule League and had become popular amongst Indians by conducting a tremendous fight against the Rowlatt Act, and had become very unpopular with the British rulers. He used to meet Gandhiji quite openly. In the beginning Gandhiji used to publish his statements through *The Bombay Chronicle*. The Government was terribly irritated and annoyed at Horniman's stinging articles but as they did not have the courage to conduct public proceedings against him because of his popularity, they banished him from the country by stealthily detaining him and putting him on a ship at night on 26th April 1919. *Young India* was a periodical, started under the auspices of *The Bombay Chronicle*. This was run by Umar Sobani and Shankarlal Banker, both were leaders of the Bombay branch of the Home Rule League. Syed Abdulla Brelvi, Mahadev's close friend from student days, became the editor after Horniman's exile. He also underwent daily harassment in conducting the newspapers. In a short time the publication of *The Bombay Chronicle* was stopped. Under these circumstances Banker and Sobani insisted that Gandhiji should take over *Young India*. After Horniman's exile Gandhiji did pay more attention to *The Chronicle*. He was also thinking of starting a periodical to convey his own thoughts to the people. And so, ultimately, he accepted the responsibility of publishing *Young India*. Horniman was ordered to leave the country on the 26th April 1919. The new edition of *Young India* under Gandhiji's supervision came out on the 7th May. It was published every Wednesday and Saturday. It was natural that though this arrangement was under Gandhiji's supervision and guidance, it was Mahadev who did the actual work. This periodical was published from Bombay during the period from May to October. During that time Mahadev had to come and stay in Bombay in a rented house in Bhatwadi. In a short time *The Bombay Chronicle* was re-started and so *Young India* was made into a weekly. How could Gandhiji be satisfied with a periodical in English only? He had to reach the people through the vernacular. So in a very short time he started a weekly in Gujarati from Ahmedabad. Just like *Young India*, it was also under the management of Banker, Sobani and friends. It was a monthly named *Navajivan And Satya* which was being run by Indulal Yagnik. These friends handed over the monthly to Gandhiji. From the 7th

September 1919, the *Navajivan* weekly was started from Ahmedabad under Gandhiji's editorship.

From the time *Young India* and *Navajivan* came under Gandhiji's management, Mahadev's untiring labour was utilised for their publication. Initially the monthly *Navajivan* And *Satya* paid no deposit under the old management, but no sooner it changed hands, than deposit was restarted. It was as if *Navajivan* lost its freedom the moment Gandhiji became its editor !

But the people were as enthusiastic about *Navajivan*, as the Government was worried about it. Five thousand copies of the first issue were sold and there was a demand for more with the second issue.

Mahadev's time and work were divided between Ahmedabad and Bombay when *Young India* was published from Bombay and *Navajivan* from Ahmedabad. This was possible only because of the help and support he received from Swami Anand. But luckily he did not have to stay for long at Bombay. Within a month of the publication of *Navajivan*, it was decided to publish *Young India* as a weekly from Ahmedabad. By that time *Navajivan* had its own press. Regarding this Gandhiji had written, "I had already learnt from my experience of *Indian Opinion* that such journals needed a press of their own. Moreover, the Press Laws in force in India at that time were such that, if I wanted to express my views, the existing printing presses which were naturally run for business, would have hesitated to publish them. The need for setting up a press of our own, therefore, became all the more imperative. . . ."²

Mahadev had to do all the work as Gandhiji was the editor of both the periodicals. Very often, because of this, Mahadev had to work till very late at night at both Bombay and Ahmedabad. He often spent nights at Mathuradas Trikarnji's place which was on the way to Bhatwadi, his temporary residence, as he used to be inordinately delayed at the press. In Ahmedabad he went to the Ashram even late at the night in a carriage as Durgaben invariably waited for their meal.

Mahadev entered journalism through *Young India* and *Navajivan*. By his exceptional genius and extreme exertion, as well as by the touch of Gandhiji's thoughts and the nobility of his life, Mahadev later on came to be known as one of the best journalists of the country.

Gandhiji's primary aim in bringing out these periodicals was to let the country and the world know his thoughts about life, about the nation, and about the entire social culture. Some of these thoughts were important and of an enduring nature, and some were of temporary importance. To select and print these thoughts according

to their use and importance in every issue depended upon Mahadev, Swami Anand and other individuals connected with the press. Moreover, Mahadev was responsible for giving his own notes of articles in the periodicals from the very beginning.

After the experience of Champaran, Gandhiji once wrote to his nephew, Jamnadas Khushalchand Gandhi, "My activities go on expanding. I am wearing myself out, the while my tempo lasts, in making known to the country all the ideals I cherish."³ The tempo that Gandhiji thought was rising during Champaran, went on rising step by step even later on. The periodicals, *Young India*, *Navajivan*, later on *Harijan* and *Harijanbandhu* were the media through which he presented his ideals before the country. If Gandhiji gave a gift to India and the world, it was Satyagraha. He never got tired of explaining about the various aspects of Satyagraha. And Mahadev also never tired of describing it, clarifying it, or commenting on it in his own way. Gandhiji always said that the object behind the idea of offering Satyagraha was to make the people fearless and free. The greatest thing Gandhiji gave to India through Satyagraha was fearlessness.

Mahadev discovered an important medium of accomplishing his life's mission through *Young India* and *Navajivan*.

* * *

A correspondent once wrote to Gandhiji in a long letter: "How can you tolerate *Navajivan* being crammed with your praises and adulation by those staying with you? We want advice; we do not want to be bored by your eulogies."

Mahadev wept in Gandhiji's presence on reading that letter. "Do people villify even good intentions?" He told Gandhiji. "I shall stop writing if it disgraces you." Gandhiji said, "I do not think that. You continue writing as you do. People will go on casting blame. How can we please all?" Mahadev had asked Vallabhbhai in a letter referring to this, "People are eager to know everything about Bapu — then what else am I to write? Should I write about quarrels, discussion of scriptures? And whom do I eulogise? I am describing only the force of love! Please let me know if you find anything improper in my writing."⁴

Due to Gandhiji's support it did not take him long to overcome his hesitation about writing. Very soon readers looked forward to Mahadev's articles. On account of the non-co-operation movement there was a big demand for both *Navajivan* and *Young India*. Gandhiji's articles left a definite and distinct impression on the nation's journalism. His periodicals were made brighter by Mahadev's pen.

National leaders came to know Mahadev because of his touring the country with Gandhiji. Two of the elder ones among those leaders were somewhat enticed by noticing the capability of Gandhiji's secretary. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru both had requested Mahadev's services. Gandhiji also believed that Mahadev would increase his ability if he would work for some time independently, without his support, in a different atmosphere.

Motilal had started at Allahabad an English paper named *The Independent* from 5th February 1919. A tradition of running a paper to project their views by leaders of repute had already begun. But even Motilal was running that paper under the editorship of Sayed Hussain. Motilalji did not work there either as did Lokmanya Tilak for his *Kesari* or *Maratha*, using them as main media for his thoughts or as did Gandhiji, pouring his all in *Young India* or *Navajivan*. Motilal used to get the work done by editors. Within a short period of two years, firstly Sayed Hussain, then C. S. Ranga and thereafter George Joseph worked as editors of *The Independent*. Motilal did not spare time to run the paper, but he decided the policy and examined it off and on. He was not completely satisfied with *The Independent* that was being published. He believed that if he got some brilliant young man, like Mahadev, his paper would really run well. And so he used to request Gandhiji off and on to send Mahadev to him.

Mahadev had gone to Ahmedabad for bringing out the first issue of *Navajivan*. At times Mahadev had to stay away from Gandhiji on account of the periodicals. At such a time he sent the issue of *Young India* or *Navajivan*, which he brought out on his own, to Gandhiji for his opinion. Similarly Gandhiji expected Mahadev's criticism for any issue brought out by himself. Whenever they had brought out periodicals together, they had always exchanged each other's articles to read and had sought the other's final consent.

Mahadev wrote to Gandhiji whilst sending such an issue of *Young India* in June 1919 :

"I have sent *Young India*. I can see innumerable mistakes therein. There are many mistakes as three different people have worked on it. I went at night and specially went through the leading article and some other portions. I saw some forgivable and some unforgivable mistakes in the main leader "Swadeshi". The press people started complaining as Patwardhan had given them the matter as the final proof, but I made corrections. This shows that all this cannot be given to an entirely new man." Mahadev, believing that Gandhiji may be arrested, continued,

"And now I come to the Punjab question. How can I speak when I am an interested party ? I have kept quiet till now only because of this feeling. But I believe, you must be on the point of solving the problem, and am writing a few words, so that I may not have to suffer an injustice. I have got a number of reasons to ask you to keep me with you if you get permission to keep someone with you in jail. I am sure you must also have imagined those reasons. But I am putting forth only one reason which you must not have thought of. I feel that I have used my body considerably since I joined you. The reason for this is firstly my mistake and secondly my enthusiasm. I also need some rest — you definitely do. And where else except in the jail can we get rest ? Among the few suitable and unsuitable things you said about me to Shankarlal Banker, one thing is perfectly true and that is 'if I allow Mahadev to work along in *Young India* he will surely die'. After you go, even if I get some colleagues, this sentence is likely to prove correct. Mathuradas said in the morning 'You were talking in your sleep yesterday — correct the proof properly, see that no mistake remains and so on.' It will be intolerable for me to stay out without you because of *Young India*. Jail experiences also are arduous. I believe that it is my privilege to share those experiences with you. I may be wrong. But I do request you to think about these matters."⁵

It appeared that going to jail was going to be quite soon. Some of the lawyers of Ahmedabad had signed the Satyagraha pledge. The District Judge of Ahmedabad asked the Bombay High Court whether anything was to be done about the lawyers signing the pledge or not. That letter was printed in *Young India* — and in the same issue Gandhiji's article, titled "Shaking Civil Resisters" also appeared. The High Court directed both Gandhiji as the editor and Mahadev as the publisher to atone for both these offences. Both rejected that directive. So both were charged with Contempt of Court. There was a possibility that both of them might have to undergo some days' imprisonment, but the High Court let them off with a warning.

In the first issue of *Navajivan* of 7th September 1919, Gandhiji insisted on printing articles by Durgaben and Maniben Parikh, both of whom were not highly educated. It was indeed an achievement on Gandhiji's part to publish articles of the almost uneducated women. Through the first issue of the first periodical started in India, Gandhiji proved two contentions : firstly, that though less educated, women did not lack experience and secondly, that literature based on experience can successfully compete with literature based on artistic talent. This must have given a fillip to women's confidence.

Once again Gandhiji invited criticism from Mahadev after the second issue :

"You ought to have sent the criticism on *Navajivan*. You should send the comments which appear in every issue. Whether I am ill or well, so long as I busy myself with *Navajivan*'s editorship, I cannot do otherwise, can I, than ask for comments on it ?"⁶

The chief interest in Mahadev's life was that of self-surrender. This used to be discussed off and on, in correspondence with Gandhiji. On 13th August 1921, Gandhiji wrote a letter from Gaya in Bihar. Mahadev's letter written from Allahabad in reply to which the letter from Gaya was written, is not available.

"Self-surrender does not, should not deprive one of one's originality. It only means that the person has realized his littleness and, therefore, relies on somebody in whom he has faith. When in doubt, such a person does not insist on his own view but yields to the friend's. Arjuna harried Krishna with no end of questions. The tortoise was a lover of God. The female tortoise would tempt God till the last. Though he scorned the counsellors and sent them away, she kept complaining to God all the time. Self-surrender does not mean giving up one's judgment. Sincere self-surrender is not inertia, it is energy. Knowing that there is someone to whom to turn ultimately a person undertakes with the knowledge of his limitations a thousand experiments, one after the other. But they are all undertaken with humility, deliberation and discrimination. I count Maganlal's self surrender of the highest order, but he has never, I believe, surrendered his judgment. Your way is quite different. You lack the spirit of adventure and as such whenever you get someone you can look up to you lose the initiative. Too much reading has dulled your originality. You want to be an assistant. One may wish to work independently and yet be extremely modest."⁷

Gandhiji had sent Mahadev to Allahabad on Motilal's request to manage his periodical, *The Independent*. Mahadev wanted to be with Gandhiji, who wrote in the same letter :

"Your motive to live with me is sincere, but it is wrong. You merely wish to imitate the West. If I always keep someone with me merely in order that a record of my activities may be kept, I myself would come to behave unnaturally. It is one thing that someone may remain by my side in the usual course of things and keep notes unobtrusively, but quite another that a person should keep notes of everything on a set purpose. Did anyone take notes of Rama's activities ? The world has lost

nothing because no one did so. Extensive notes of Johnson's talks were taken but I do not see they have conferred on the world any great benefit that I know of. We do not at all look at your work merely from the point of view of literature. However, I do want you always to be with me. Your grasp is so good and you are so well equipped. I should like you to understand everything about my life and work. I have a great many ideas, but they find expression only as occasions arise. There are subtleties which no one follows. My innocent comments on Vasantram Shastri's letter were understood neither by Kaka nor by Swami. You understood them a little better than they. My delicate feelings in those comments went unnoticed. The tempting thought does not leave me therefore, that if I had a man like you by my side he could in the course of time take up my work. I do not wish yet to employ you exclusively on any one task, but want you, instead, to gather experience. Moreover, if you get acquainted with everyone whom I know, our work in future will be easier."⁸

It is clear from this letter that Gandhiji had not sent Mahadev away to Motilal permanently. If an elderly leader like Motilal supported the non-co-operation movement, the non-violent struggle for freedom would be strengthened to a great extent. He felt that Mahadev's capabilities would blossom if he worked independently, for some time without leaning on anyone. He would become more suitable for the work he had planned for him. He did not want him to keep mere notes of what he said. He was clear about the work Mahadev had to do. It was to put forth before the world, after fully understanding what Gandhiji wanted to say. Mahadev could not consider his work for *The Independent* as his duty even after going to Allahabad and taking it over. Meanwhile Gandhiji was trying to explain from various angles what his duty was. Gandhiji continued in the same letter after informing him that he was getting another assistant :

"It will, therefore, be good if you join *Young India* when you are free from there. If you feel like taking up *Young India* to run it independently and develop it, I do not mind. Though I personally believe that the paper will not be needed after I am gone. Perhaps some of you believe that if you could continue to spread my message you will be able to run it. Even for this, it is not necessary that you should join it. On the contrary, I feel that after you have matured through experience you will be better equipped to run *Young India* by yourself."⁹

Motilal had asked for Mahadev's services only for a short time, but who would not desire to keep such a useful person permanently ?

Mahadev consulted Gandhiji about this. Gandhiji wrote to him "Motilalji certainly wants you to stay on, but the main thing for you to consider is what you yourself would like to do. If you find the work very strenuous or if the place does not suit your health, do come away."¹⁰

Mahadev had suggested that Motilal should ask for K. Santhanam from Lala Lajpatrai. He had stayed in Punjab for some time and practised law there. Gandhiji wrote about Mahadev's suggestion, "How can we tell him? He is like Lalaji's right hand!" Mahadev asked rather shyly, "And what am I?" Gandhiji replied immediately, "You are my brain." Gandhiji wrote about this from the train while he was going to Calcutta.

"Can one be more important to a man than his right hand? 'If only I were the right hand' could have been written in grief or with knowledge. If in grief, I would say you have not understood me. If you wrote it with knowledge, all is well. Two brains can drift apart from each other, but can hand be separated from the brain to do anything? I am training you to work as a brain. Santanam being a 'permanent Under Secretary', cannot leave. I should like you to understand your position rightly."¹¹

The question is how far was Gandhiji correct? He was keen to train Mahadev to keep away from him and become capable to solve problems without his support. Mahadev never considered himself Gandhiji's heir; but could never imagine his life away from Gandhiji. He used to feel giddy when there was any reference to Gandhiji's death. He could never imagine himself without Gandhiji.

On the 15th May 1921 Mahadev came to Bombay from Ahmedabad and helped Gandhiji in the collection of the Tilak Swaraj Fund, and also collected on his own. By that time he must have become adept at collecting funds. Gandhiji had praised him for this in a couple of his letters. 30th June was the last day for the collection of the Tilak Swaraj Fund. The target of one crore rupees had been reached. Mahadev took over the new responsibility of working at Allahabad with Motilal Nehru on the 3rd of July. Even after reaching Allahabad he had not been able to decide whether to continue there or to work with Gandhiji. The latter had explained his motive in handing him over to Motilal and had asked him to decide finally for himself. His premise was 'do as you wish'. Mahadev was in two minds from the beginning of July to right upto the middle of August. In a letter written to Devdas Gandhi on the 19th August, he wrote, that he had made his decision and that his insecure condition had ended.

Initially Motilal's request for Mahadev's services was till he got someone suitable. And Gandhiji had sent Mahadev with that understanding. Even he was keen to call him back to be by his side. This time he had decided to keep Mahadev entirely with himself and not spare him for *Young India*. And so he had already told him that he had to be either in Allahabad or with himself, not for *Young India*. But Mahadev started working with the aim of managing *The Independent* in the best possible manner and this gave him strength. His indecision disappeared. No doubt he had to send for Gandhiji's criticism for every issue of the paper even from Allahabad. Sometimes Gandhiji's articles from *Young India* appeared in *The Independent* and at times some matter from *The Independent* appeared in *Young India*.

Mahadev himself was satisfied with his work after the end of his indecision. Other colleagues such as George Joseph, editor of *The Independent*, Jawaharlal, Motilal and Gandhiji were undoubtedly satisfied with his work. Mahadev mentioned a couple of times that his training under Gandhiji was helping in his work.

When they were not together and if either one of them did not get a letter every three-four days, there was always a complaint.

These letters held discussion on philosophy as well as politics. Both considered these two subjects as necessary for their *tapashcharya*. Mahadev's letter contained more of devotion, while Gandhiji's contained knowledge gathered through experience. The following letter written by Mahadev on *Dhanterash* (an auspicious day — two days before Diwali, the festival of lights), requested Gandhiji to address him as *Chutaniji* (a form of address for youngsters, specially close ones). The letter indicated Mahadev's emotions even in sickness. His health had suffered a set-back in Allahabad.

"I am not bothered whether the fever has gone or not. I am quite happy, lying down in bed. You may consider it wrong. I experience unabated joy. No one understood my joy. Neither did the stupid professor (Acharya Kripalani) nor any one else. Panditji may understand it; he is full of poetry, but harbours it like an unfavoured queen. These five days of mine are going to be blissful. Five days, beginning from the time I sent you my offering. I do not get sleep at night. Something like poetry comes to the mind — poems — of Kaivalyanand only. I have experienced what Arjun Bhagat says, 'Not for a moment there was sleep, and so through the words I came to know.' Won't you consider me blessed? But does it matter if you don't consider me so? Only you are the father and I will be confused at that. This morning even amidst this joy, I had

tears. Do you want to know why? Because you have not addressed me as 'Chi'. 'What is given without asking is like milk, it becomes water, the moment you ask for it.'

"This night was invaluable. I cannot bore you by describing it, moreover, I don't have the strength in my fingers to write it. I suddenly remembered to-night a stanza of a *bhajan* I had sent you. This may not be in the copy I sent you.

'The string is really in his hands, a step is taken as per His wish,

The tune emerges from the instrument, just as the player plays it,

Krishna can do what he wants.'

"Today my mood for the *bhajan* was changed. This morning the following was in my mind. (You do not know it.)

'Thou art the only one residing in my heart,

Thou art the only instrument of my heart.

Only in Thy feet, Oh my Lord!

My mind is fixed, morning and evening.

I went and saw every flower in the garden,

There is neither Thy colour, nor Thy fragrance,

The white dove sings on the flowers in the Garden,

Thou art the Only One, the Only One, the Only One'

I am experiencing this.

Accept my obedience; give me your belssings."¹²

When discussing with Mahadev about leaders of his own age, or those older to him, Gandhiji used to talk in very definite terms. He wrote about two elders:

"I cannot imagine that either Malaviyaji or the Poet is envious of me. Both lack fearlessness and are proud of their opinions and ideas. You can tolerate pride if it is not accompanied by fear. They cannot overlook the shortcomings of non-co-operators as we do and so may oppose us. Besides they are confused by the novelty and simplicity of my ideas. To believe anything more than this about them seems to me positively sinful. Bipin Babu and Vijayraghavachariar may think all sorts of things about me. Ramakant, I consider but a child. He appears to have opposed me to show that he is a man of independent views. We should leave him alone and go on offering our comments as journalists without acrimony. Do point out the Poet's and Malaviyaji's ideas on . . . whenever there is an occasion for doing so. This cannot be done freely in *Young India*, but it can be easily and tactfully done in *The Independent*."¹³

Today when we are being inundated with multinational companies how do you find the imagined picture of the country after independence ?

"Is it not a shortcoming of my *tapashcharya* that I cannot convince people in the matter of *swadeshi* ? A perfect *tapasvi*, though silent, does influence through his sincere feelings. Some do so by a mere hint. Some by word of mouth and some by writing. What is the meaning of all this ? Those who wear khaddar only in my presence do so out of love for me and not owing to my *tapashcharya*. Surely a free India of the future is not going to import cloth. Are we going to import bottles of water and medicines from England ? Our *dharma* will change when our country ceases to grow cotton. We shall then have to leave the load."¹⁴

But very often personal subjects were discussed in the letters between the two.

On a New Year day Gandhiji blessed Mahadev, "Blessings to both of you. May you remain *tandurast* (healthy in body), *mandurast* (healthy in mind), and *dildurast* (healthy at heart), in the new year." Mahadev wrote in reply :

"I accept your blessings with reverence This is just a joke. I am not saying that you have used aliteration in '*tandurast*, *mandurast* and *dildurast*' purposely, but have written it in sheer joy I was reminded of a senseless discussion indulged in some years ago by some of our learned men and I laughed heartily."¹⁵

Gandhiji's next letter started with that quotation :

" '*Dil*' means the self, because it means the heart *Tandurast* is a hackneyed word I wanted to write to you about the health of your body, but how could I be content with wishing you only physical health ?

"We must perform the duties arising from the existence of the body. Eating, bathing, going from place to place for begging — all these we do, thinking them to be legitimate activities, and show aversion only to bread labour, purification of the mind is achievement by mental *yajna*, that of the *atman* by the *yajna* of the *atman*, and of the body by *yajna* of the body (i.e. physical labour) Man cannot make a proper return for the food he gets for his body by doing mental work One does *yajna* of the body, if one labours without expecting food in return At the present time and in this country, *yajna* of the body can be performed only by working on the spinning-wheel, for its absence has enfeebled the body of the country If the climate of India and our needs change, we can take up another

kind of *yajna*. If it comes about that for getting water in our country we have always to dig wells, then digging of wells would become a sacrifice to some extent. But then, as long as such a state of things continues, bodily *yajna* is necessary just as *brahmacharya* and other things are necessary. And because it is only a duty attaching to the body, the latter can be free from the obligation of performing this *yajna* when it does not consume food. But unlike in the case of prayer which being an act of the mind or the heart, a man like me believes or persuades himself that he is performing it all the twenty-four hours and does not have a fixed time for it every day, one cannot persuade oneself that one is performing bodily *yajna* without actually doing so, since it is an act to be performed by the body. One may not perform it with one's whole heart behind it and so deceive people, that would be another matter, but perform it he must. This answers both your questions on the subject."⁶

The non-co operation movement, started in August 1920 was in its full swing by the end of 1921. Students were leaving colleges in thousands. National Schools started in every province. Members of the Legislative Assemblies and the Executive Council were resigning their membership and joining the movement. Lawyers, and barristers gave up legal practice. Workers were being arrested at various places. Imprisonment was no longer a subject or curiosity of fright.

Allahabad was naturally one of the centres of this movement. How could a non-co operation movement be sluggish where there were old and venerable leaders like Motilal Nehru and exuberant youth like Jawaharlal?

And if a newspaper guided by Motilal, run by fire-breathing George Joseph and calm yet strong-minded Mahadev Desai, did not flourish during this period when would it do so?

By December *The Independent's* office had become a work zone. Its editor George Joseph had a spirited pen. Mahadev wrote about him in a letter:

"I have realised his real capacity only in this week. From the very start his quality was evident, but today it seems that he can be the editor next only to Bapu. There is no end to his originality, his knowledge and his mastery over the art of writing. I am nowhere near him. It would be audacious on my part to come to replace him, but my heart tells me even now that I have not committed that audacity."¹⁷

Nehru, father and son, and *The Independent's* editor, George Joseph were arrested on the 6th. Before this Motilal had received a notice that the Prince of Wales (whose visit was boycotted by the

Congress) was going to pass in front of his house. During that time no one else but his family members or relatives should be allowed to be present and the police were allowed to enter. Motilal refused point blank to accept the notice. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. A bail of rupee two thousand was demanded for his paper. He gave instructions that the bail amount should be paid and Mahadev should take charge as the editor. Accordingly, Mahadev took over as the Editor on the 7th. Motilal had instructed that Gandhiji should be consulted if Mahadev was arrested. Mahadev informed Gandhiji telegraphically about this and asked for his instructions. Gandhiji sent a telegram in reply inquiring after Mrs. Nehru, instructing Mahadev to take over with confidence and assuring him of sending Devdas to replace him if necessary. At the same time he gave instructions to improve *The Independent*, to keep a check on reports and to let the reports be few but true.

On the ninth Mahadev sent another telegram saying

"JOSEPH RECEIVED TWO YEARS' SENTENCE, SIMPLE IMPRISONMENT. HE WAS TAKEN TO AGRA JAIL. HE WAS PLACED IN FIRST CLASS. MRS. JOSEPH IN A GOOD MOOD. DISTRIBUTED MRS. NEHRU'S MESSAGE IN THE CITY AND PRINTED IN THE *THE INDEPENDENT* SENDING A TELEGRAM TO NAVAJIVAN KRISHNAKANT MALAVIYA NOW NON-CO-OPERATOR. READY TO BECOME A MEMBER DEFYING COLLECTOR'S ORDER AND READY TO GO TO JAIL WITH OTHER VOLUNTEERS. STOPPED HIM FOR THE PRESENT ASKING HIM TO WAIT FOR YOUR ORDER. REPLY BY EXPRESS TELEGRAM TRYING TO RESTRAIN HIM FROM TAKING AN UNWISE STEP. THANKS FOR SENDING DEVDAS."

Mahadev sent another telegram on the 20th :

"THE BAIL AMOUNT IS CONFISCATED. IN THE NOTICE SERVED THIS MORNING IT IS SAID THAT THERE ARE WORDS WHICH INTERFERE WITH LAW AND ORDER IN MRS. NEHRU'S MESSAGE AND IN THE ARTICLE 'LET US SEE IT THROUGH'. SENT THE NOTICE'S MATTER TO *YOUNG INDIA* INTEND BRINGING OUT HAND WRITTEN COPIES FROM TOMORROW. SEND DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS TELEGRAPHICALLY. THOUGH WILL BE ARRESTED ANY TIME."

Gandhiji's telegram came in reply :

"BRAVO! GET AS MANY VOLUNTEERS COPYISTS, AS POSSIBLE. MULTIPLY ON RONEO. GIVE BRIEFEST NEWS AND INFORMING ARTICLE. DAILY VOLUNTEERS TO SELL PAPERS."

Gandhiji gave the recent history of the closure of *The Independent* briefly in *Young India* and added :

"The law we know, the notification of disbandment, the order too we know, the prohibition of the holding of public meetings. . . . But the Government will soon find out its mistake. *The Independent* may die, but the spirit it has evoked

among the people cannot die. . . . If the editor is a trustee for his employers, he has also his own individuality to keep. Mahadev Desai, the Editor, lives, although the printer in him may sleep for a while. And I am hoping that now he will write his paper instead of printing it."²⁰

Gandhiji wrote to Devdas in a letter: "I am waiting for a telegram about Mahadev's arrest and that you too have gone to jail."

The issue of *The Independent* of the 22nd December was one which could open a new page in the history of Indian journalism. It was the first time when an editor brought out and distributed a complete issue of a paper — hand-written. The following was the leader in that issue:

NEW INCARNATION

We owe new *avatar* to those who 'seeing see not, hearing hear not, not do thus have discrimination'. The whole policy of repression is a deliberate, calculated dive into the abyss of darkness. By arresting us the Government are hacking through their understanding, by gagging our speech and writing, they deliberately choose to 'see not seeing' and 'hear not hearing'. But they know not what they do or say. For instance if Sir Harcourt had his eyes, his ears and his understanding would he say the things he has been saying? Would Mr. Montagu, with his wits about himself say, 'There is no repression in India'? There is no darkness like the ignorance of our ignorance. And we are at eternal war with darkness and with the powers of darkness.

It seems God is helping us in the war. For the ways of Satan and God are ever marked. The tyrant being bad, believes himself to be good. He is afraid of the humble who knows what a mixture of good and bad he is and looks to God for guidance. The more, therefore, the tyrant is swayed by the pride of power, the nearer he goes to destruction. The more we are conscious of our frailties and the more we strive for light, guidance and purification, the nearer we are to victory.

Our security was forfeited because the articles "Mrs. Nehru's Message" and "Let us also see it through" were considered to be 'interfering with the administration of law and the maintenance of law and order'. We may frankly say that we do not recognise any law made by the Government. Nor do we recognise any of their ways of keeping law and order. Truth, non-violence and other laws of our ethical code are sufficient to keep us true to us and to God. We will, therefore, endeavour

our best to preach the message that Mrs. Nehru has preached and also 'to see it through'.

It is likely that this endeavour, like its predecessor, may also be suppressed. It is likely that we may, with all our helpmates and comrades be deprived of our slave-liberties. No consummation would be more devoutly to be wished for. In a way it is with intense pain that we have to launch on this venture. For life in a reign of falsehood, injustice and terror, is bearable only in jail. The tyrant is potent enough to control every one of the activities of our mortal frame, but he cannot touch the immortal spirit within. He may force the one to submit to his law, he may not dream of forcing his law on the other. I may be killed, which only means, 'I change, but I cannot die.' "21

Once Gandhiji had complained that *The Independent* that was being brought out was uncouth. But he had guessed that it was so because it was done by inexperienced hands. In the month of December messages were received from Gandhiji that he was waiting for the good news of Mahadev's arrest. Mahadev wrote in a letter, "My humble enterprise has been highly successful. People have bought the hand written copies at asked for prices. A lot of enthusiasm is spreading around. Today I shall bring out a thousand copies." Mahadev made a note at one place, that one copy was bought for thirty-two rupees. Twenty-five years later Pyarelal said that if he remembered correctly, one copy had fetched two hundred and fifty rupees. This may not be the exact figure, but even the price of thirty to thirty-two rupees for an issue of one anna is enough to prove its popularity.

How could Mahadev withhold such exciting news from Narahari? He wrote that he was anticipating some immediate recognition, and he realised that like Byron, he woke up one day and found himself famous. Till then he did not think he would have been arrested. "But now to the Government the king and the footmen were equal. So now the footman would also become famous like the king."22

Mahadev also wrote to Narahari, "My devotees over here tell me that some of the better articles remind us of *Young India*. God alone knows that. If there is no colour or fragrance of *Young India*, I would consider all my training futile."22

At last that delightful moment arrived. When on his return from Lucknow Mahadev started preparing the next issue of *The Independent*, a policevan arrived with the invitation. Mahadev indeed, was ready. He had written and kept the leading article for the next issue ready before the police arrived. Devdas was all

prepared to replace him. Gandhiji sent a telegram to Devdas, which appeared in *The Bombay Chronicle* of 3rd January 1922

"VERY HAPPY ABOUT MAHADEV HOPE DURGHA IS WELL AND STRONG SHE CAN RETURN IF SHE WANTS HOPE YOU WILL KEEP THE PERIODICAL RUNNING TILL YOU ARE ARRESTED AND OTHERS ARE READY TO TAKE YOUR PLACE."²³

Mahadev gave a vivid, mirthful yet pathetic picture of the agitation of a director of the 'National Journals Ltd.', the firm owning *The Independent* at the time when the bail-money was confiscated. This he did in a letter written to Gandhiji during the journey to and from Lucknow to meet Panditji.

"I wanted to write a letter to you yesterday, but I was unable to do so. Yesterday I was occupied from morning eleven to night nine without a moment's respite for food or even calls of nature, to bring out the hand-written paper. You will wonder why such a lot of time had to be spent to bring out such a rag ! But there is no end to difficulties I positively believe that a man who talks of difficulties, is a coward, but please do not misunderstand me if I write a couple of things to let you know about the situation here.

"Day before yesterday, the moment the police raid came, the directors rushed to the press and stopped the machines. As only 1500 copies were printed out of the 5000 I said, 'We would not print anything new, but why should we not finish what we already have begun ?' They were right that legally we could not print even for a second after the notice was served. But the cowards did not have the capacity to think that I had received the notice at home. It would be all right if I get the work stopped after I reached the press . . . which may take me some time. But they lost patience. They rushed there in a car, the machines stopped. Then they came to me. They asked me, 'What do you intend to do ?' I said, 'I will bring out a hand-written paper.' They were surprised and went home without a word.

"I went to the office and started my preparations for the new paper. Another director came there. My preparations for a new paper in the office was worrying him. He said, 'Have you thought of the risks of taking out this paper ?' I said, 'Yes, . . . there is not a single risk in it for you.' He countered, 'I hope you will not bring it out on behalf of the National Journals Ltd.' You will name it differently, won't you ?' I said, 'I have decided to bring it out from Anand Bhavan, because I knew you won't have the courage. As you have no trade mark or patent on the name of *The Independent* that is exactly what I

will name the paper.' He was startled. I said, 'Why are you startled? Pandit Motilal is aware that I am going to bring out this paper. You may go and see him. While you meet him I do hope you will have the courtesy to let me use papers and telegrams in your office.' He consented shakily.

"I lost an hour and a half in persuading him, from my twelve hours! Members of my staff were also startled at the mention of hand written paper. So I had to direct them all how to get the news, arrange them and write them. No one had the habit of shortening the news so did not know how to do it. Pyarelal is very raw though very enthusiastic and loving. He cannot be given the charge of the paper. He is still a bit childish. But no one has his enthusiasm and affection. He worked till five-thirty in the morning yesterday. I have written about my co-workers, by the way.

"There was another problem ready for me. At four in the evening another director came. He had learnt law so started talking about the Press Act. He was satisfied only when I threw the Press Act for him to read. I told him, 'Don't you be worried. Let me use your office till you get Panditji's decision.' He said, 'We may allow you to use the office; but suppose they seize the Press?' I said, 'How can they? You have put gigantic locks on the press.' (There is no ink in my pen now, and I have also reached Lucknow. Now I have returned to the station after meeting Panditji for a couple of hours and am writing this. I will go to Allahabad by the 10.30 train at night. Now I would continue my interrupted narration.)

"He said, 'They would break the locks.' I said, 'Then they might arrest you and break open your house. Will you be able to prevent the Government from doing this?' He kept quiet. Just then our accountant came to get a bill passed for the papers, pencil and stationery. I had ordered for the paper in the morning. The director said, 'The bill cannot be passed.' I said, 'Put it in suspense account and please pass it today! You can ask Panditji about it. Otherwise, you collect the money from me.' Then he indicated that the Paper must not be brought out till the Directors' meeting.' I said stiffly, 'Within a very short time the Paper's office would be shifted to Anand Bhavan, then you would have nothing to do with it. I cannot stop the Paper even for a day.' Thereafter the director went away.

"Meanwhile our Paper was being prepared. But three cyclostyle machines betrayed me. I couldn't get good copies out of those machines. I tried for three to four hours but in vain. And Devdas could not get a volunteer to make copies. At

the end, we put today's date on the Paper. Two or three of us took out 10 copies after working up to two at night. Pyarelal would not get up till the ten copies were ready. He kept awake till 5-30 in the morning. I slept at two as I had worked for fourteen to fifteen hours that day. I got up in the morning and wrote to-morrow's editorial because Jawaharlal had sent a telegram saying, 'Father wants to meet you or Devdas.' As I could not convey all the information about the Paper through Devdas, I handed over getting the news ready to Pyarelal and my staff and handing over my 'editorial notes', started for Lucknow. Just then I got some good news that about a dozen copyists were ready and one cyclostyle machine was giving excellent copies. I hoped — I have prayed the whole time whilst going to Lucknow that at least 200 copies may be printed."²⁴

Describing the condition of the Lucknow prisoners, Mahadev continued giving a resume of his talk with Motilalji:

"Panditji was extremely happy on seeing me and he embraced me. Jawaharlal clung on to me. Saw my periodical. And I do believe it is not conceit if I said that he was charmed by it. Because he just continued gazing at it. The words, 'I change, but I cannot die', he must have repeated no less than fifty to sixty times. He read through the whole Paper. There was nothing to suggest or correct. Only, 'do write a line to-morrow that you are bringing out this Paper and that it had no connection with *The Independent Company*'. He immediately arranged for the finances. Jawahar gave me a cheque for Rs. 500/- on the spot and told me, 'Spend whatever you want to, but bring out the Paper and come to the prison because now they will not leave you.' I said, 'I have sent one copy to Nox, the Collector and one to Sir Hartcourt Butler. If after all this effort of mine I am still not imprisoned, my destiny should be blamed — who else?'

"Then I gave all the news about Allahabad. Jawahar was happy that I had not allowed Devdas to attend the Congress Session for the sake of peace at Allahabad. He was also happy that you had sent Pyarelal for the Paper and that I was training him. He said, 'You continue according to God's guidance. My umpteen blessings are with you and your Paper.' What more encouragement can I get? I am returning, highly refreshed, though having had many sleepless nights. And I cannot describe my happiness when I receive your blessings which are sure to come — though I am not sure if you would approve of everything. Jawaharlal wrote notes to get all the cyclostyle machines available in Allahabad, wrote notes to all those who

could be helpful, the letters are to be written and sent from my office tomorrow to all the District Congress Committees sending the Paper to them asking them each to distribute as many copies as they can print. Purushottamdas Tandon came over. He asked Panditji, 'Why should there not be a Hindi edition of this Paper?' So Panditji ordered that a Hindi edition should be brought out. As the security of the Swaraj Press was confiscated, the Hindi Paper should be named *Swaraj* and I was to be the editor!!! Like you, I am also now an Editor of two periodicals — isn't it a good imitation of yours by me? — Oh, but I forget, you are the Editor of three periodicals I am an editor of two but a publisher of three — am I not? I am sure you have not forgotten that I am the publisher of *Young India*. But this is just by way of fun!

"Can you send Jugatram from there? His handwriting is beautiful, he is expert in cyclostyling, and there must be someone to fill our place! Pyarelal would be the editor once I am arrested. They seem to be purposely refraining from arresting Devdas. Or else both myself and Devdas have openly committed offences. How can I describe the wholesome effect Devdas has had on the city? Crowds collect to see the Mahatma's Prince at various places. Policemen salute him and are ashamed of their profession and give expression to this shame in front of the prince! Crowds listen to what he says. He has become a leader of the volunteers just as Krishna had become one of the cowherds! I accept the offence of partiality. I get a lot of warmth from Devdas. He also has my assistance, literally it is mutual. As we don't have enough covering and the cold is severe, we both sleep together and pray every morning and evening that we may get the chance to sleep in each other's embrace in jail.

"Shall I confess that I stopped Devdas from coming to Ahmedabad? As there is no one else in this desolate city things would have been in a disarray without him. I cannot handle two things though I am an office-bearer and he gets my constant advice. But Devdas is always present. I positively believe that the day before yesterday the Police Superintendent would have beaten the volunteers had Devdas not been their leader, he refrained because he felt embarrassed before Devdas. Everyone knows Devdas 'Gandhi's son, harmless', is the message given to the Collector through the telephone.

"I do hope you do not believe that we have not been able to go to prison because of our harmlessness. We have not left any stone unturned."²⁵

Before we talk about Mahadev being produced in the Allahabad Court, let us go back and glance at a very important aspect of his personal life. Some of the old anecdotes, instead of being given earlier, at their proper place, have been given here to be able to describe the whole topic at one place.

Life was difficult from the point of view of marital relationship. Mahadev and Durgaben had to stay away from each other on account of continuous touring. Meetings and separations both were full of intense feelings. There would be waves of joy and showers of love at the time of meeting however short the span; and sulks and coaxings at the time of separation and both shed tears.

At times this feeling of sorrow followed Mahadev along with Durgaben's eyes and quite often it found expression in pathetic or angry words in letters. Occasionally this unbearable agitation became quite fierce. More than once on such occasions Mahadev's letters were torn up by Durgaben. The memories of these sad and bitter occasions are preserved only in the correspondence with his bosom friend Narahari.

In 1917, when Mahadev came to Gandhiji, the understanding he had with Durgaben was that both of them would stay with Gandhiji together. That they would be able to live a life of reunion and service together instead of a life of ordinary worldly pleasures.

On reaching Champaran it became evident almost within the first week that the idea of living together would only be a dream. Gandhiji wanted to include Mahadev in his personal as well as political life which meant that it would become inevitable for Mahadev to join him in all his tours. This was totally different from the idea of spending the life together. On perceiving Durgaben's sense of service and sincerity in service, Gandhiji felt that she should continue the activity she had started in Champaran. Durgaben was not at all happy to work for welfare in Champaran as it kept her away from Mahadev. It had already been mentioned that she offered to Gandhiji to do any work if she could be staying with him. Gandhiji had tried several times to call Durgaben by his side, after that letter, but somehow Mahadev and Durgaben could not be together for a long period. Durgaben was indeed present at both Sabarmati and Allahabad during Mahadev's sickness. In those days Durgaben was worried about Mahadev's condition in spite of his fun-loving nature and his desire to give minimum trouble to those nursing him. Some friends had pressed him to send for Durgaben when he was living in Bombay writing for *Young India*. But Mahadev felt that Durga's self respect may suffer at the friend's places he had to live. Once when Mahadev had to go to Ahmedabad in connection with *Navajivan* work, Gandhiji had sent Durgaben at

that very time to Vijapur for training in khadi work ' Mahadev wrote to Narahari,

"How can any one help if our luck is against us ? Bapu was daily writing to me that I should send for Durga I had decided to come there for a couple of days, either today or tomorrow. Just then I received your letter that she would be going today to Vijapur In a way I was happy. She would be busy there and thinking about the new place, she would not worry about me. But I am just pointing out the games Dame Luck plays."²⁶

Durgaben, occasionally went to her parental home to forget about the separation and spent her time with her mother. If on those days Mahadev went to the Ashram either with Bapu or for some other work, he would immediately ask Durgaben to come to the Ashram Sometimes he even wrote, "I have ordered Durga to go to the Ashram. She would arrive there on Sunday."

Once having missed meeting her thus by luck, he wrote to his 'dear brother', Narahari : "Durga must have been disappointed But what can be done ? Sometimes, when I am doing nothing here, I sing :

There is no desire to eat anything,
There is none to drink anything,
I have need of nothing else,
Just seeing You is enough.

"So even from a selfish point of view I do wish that Durga were here. But that is not possible. I do not feel that her self respect would be maintained."²⁷

Sometimes this separation became unbearable. The problem could not be solved by merely blaming Lady Luck The thorn of separation became as piercing as a trident.

Once again Mahadev wrote to Narahari :

"Durga's condition has become very disturbing Her letters are all hysterical. And I am really worried that she may start getting hysteria. What should I do about her ? Bapu knows that the house here is hopeless and nasty. There is nothing but disappointment in Bombay Because of work idle thoughts do not trouble us. And still Bapu asks me to call Durga If I call Durga here, she will be hurt and I will also be hurt Can you not make her a fine copyist ? How nice it would have been if she knew how to copy in English ? At times I start getting funny thoughts. . . . When I am in the tramcar or have nothing to do in the Press, I feel envious of the rich — would you believe it ? Sometimes I feel the lack of enough money for both

of us to travel and to stay here independently — but what is the use of the might have beens ?”²⁸

This condition can be called penance, but it was more of suffering than penance. In Mahadev's own words — ‘till there is no conscious joy in penance, it is not penance but suffering. It is not virtue.’

Durgaben sometimes got angry, at times went into a sulk and when it became unbearable, she said things which should not have been said.

Mahadev wrote, “Durga's displeasure is tremendous. What should I do to satisfy her ? Last time it was the limit when she said, ‘Some day I will do something which will keep you away from me for life.’ We are both cruel to each other. But now the old man is busy looking for a house for us.”²⁸

Today, looking in the past, seventy years ago, the problem does not appear to be so tangled. There was love on all the three sides of this love-triangle. Envy, the usual troublemaker in a love-triangle, was not present in this. The ideas and insistence on the way of life were responsible for the tussle among these three. Mahadev wanted to see Durga satisfied and happy. He wanted to stay with her but he was sure that the atmosphere in which he was staying was not conducive to her self-respect. The most important reason for Durga's joining Gandhiji was because she wanted to see her husband live a life according to his ideals. In doing so she had been dragged away from all her other relatives, but yet she did not get her husband's company. Her friends stayed in the Ashram with their husbands. For her husband, the Ashram was a temporary place of pilgrimage, and he could not even take her with himself. And so for her every moment was a torture. Gandhiji had immense love for both of them. He wanted that both of them should stay together, as Mahadev was more or less earning steadily then. But he did not have the time to realise that it was not possible for them to do so with self-respect in the situation he had created for Mahadev. Mahadev had clarified this to ‘dear Narahari’ but not to ‘revered Bapuji’. And so this ‘mutual cruelty’ was being stretched till ‘the old man looked for a house’.

Narahari did not fail to do his friend's work. Durgaben could open her heart to him and Maniben in the whole Ashram. Narahari read to her Mahadev's letters to him, which he received almost daily. He explained the English passages written therein. He took care to see that Durgaben did not develop a dislike towards Bapu's thoughts. Mahadev also wrote a letter almost daily to Durga. He expressed pain and regret if he could not write for three or four days. Quite often Durga got to read two letters, one addressed to her and one to Narahari. But Durga was 26 years old then and Mahadev

27 Both were self-restrained and discerning in their attitudes but were absorbed in love for each other. Thus it was easy to understand Durga's feelings and Mahadev's worry.

Gandhiji wanted to send both of them for a rest and a change of place after Mahadev's sickness. But regarding the place chosen, there was a painful disagreement between him and Mahadev for some time. Chandulal Dalal has described that incident vividly and lucidly and hence it has been given here in its entirety.

Since some time Mahadevbhai felt that Gandhiji's behaviour towards him had become intentionally indifferent.

Dr. Pranjivandas Mehta, Gandhiji's friend who was in Burma at the time, wrote a letter to him. He wrote that one of his sons (Ratilal) had a mild attack of madness, treatment was being given and there was a hope of a cure, but Dr. Mehta had expressed a desire to get someone as a companion for him.

Gandhiji suggested Mahadev's name and wrote back that Ratilal could be safely handed over to him, and that Dr. Mehta was cognisant of his knowledge.

And so Gandhiji suggested that Mahadev should go for his rest to Burma and take advantage of Dr. Pranjivandas's hospitality. Mahadevbhai felt that Gandhiji must have wanted to kill two birds with one stone, use his rest-period by giving a really good companion for Dr. Pranjivandas's son.

Gandhiji did not talk about Ratilal to Mahadevbhai. His argument to him was entirely different. The conversation was something as follows :

Gandhiji : Dr. Pranjivandas is at present on some hill station.

Mahadevbhai : Hill station ?

Gandhiji : Oh yes ! That is the place from where he has written the letter.

Mahadevbhai knew about the letter and the place. The place was named Thita. According to his knowledge, Dr. Pranjivandas was getting his farms cultivated there. That place was malaria-prone all round the year. A gentleman named Shivabhai fell sick there and was just saved from death. Moreover, Dr. Pranjivandas had written only to say that he had gone to Thita to explore about farming, but Gandhiji took it that it was a hill station.

When Gandhiji came to Bombay, he once again opened the topic. He told Kishorelalbai, "I intend to send Mahadev to Burma this time. He will stay with Dr. Mehta who is there on a hill station."

Kishorelalbai talked about this to Revashankarbhai, when it was found out that Dr. Pranjivandas was at no hill station and that he had gone to Thita only to inquire about farming.

Mahadev had a talk with Dr Jivrajbhai. He said, "For a month and a half I would not allow you to go to Burma because if you got sea-sick, you may get a relapse of the fever."

Dr. Ice also gave the same opinion.

Swami Anand suggested to Gandhiji, "Take Mahadev to Sinhagadh."

Gandhiji : Burma is best for him. Sinhagadh is a place for sick people like me. Can Mahadev be called sick ? He must start walking twenty miles a day. Moreover, he would be able to see many things in Burma and go to so many places.

He turned to Mahadev and asked, "Have you thought about it ?"

Mahadevbhai : Doctor's opinions are against it.

Gandhiji : (Slightly rudely) Doctor's opinions are all very well. What does your mind say ? Go on, why don't you say something ? If you do not want to go it's O. K. '

Mahadevbhai : Dr. Pranjivandas is going to England, so I would not get his company by going there.

Gandhiji : "What does it matter if he is not there ? I do not see any objection in going there.

When Gandhiji left Bombay on the 6th March 1920, whilst bidding farewell to Mahadev he only said, "You will recover your former health within fifteen days." Mahadevbhai felt that even this time there was an intentional indifference in Gandhiji's behaviour, and the distance between them both was increasing.

Mahadevbhai went to Matheran on the 7th.

For three days he thought intensely over these incidents, he ruminated over them, and felt that Gandhiji had become a victim of a particular mental make up. It became evident that once he decided upon something, his attitude was to find out justifications and reasons for that decision and also a lack of tolerance (for other opinions). He also felt that Gandhiji may be apparently tolerating those who differ from his thoughts, but he felt a rancour in his inner-most heart for the people opposing him.

Along with the above thoughts Mahadev also decided that if he is convinced of haste in forming this opinion, he would ask forgiveness for it.

He also decided that if Gandhiji wanted him along with him in his tours he would have to arrange to take Durga with them (*Gandhiji* and Mahadev), and so some leave had to be taken every year. He should not bother if his value went down because of these demands, in the eyes of Gandhiji.

From Matheran he sent a report of Gandhiji's attitude, the impression that he had got, his thoughts and his plans for the future, to Narahari on the 10th

Kishorelal was in Bombay. Narahari must have read this letter to him. The same night Kishorelal wrote a letter to Narahari. It seemed that he also felt that the impression created on Mahadev regarding Bapu's attitude, about which Mahadev had written to Narahari, had some basis for it.

The stay at Matheran turned out to be advantageous for Mahadev. Even after four days' stay he realised that he did not have rest for two to three years. The weather was nice and so was the company. Lallubhai took great care of his health. Aware that Mahadev had just recovered from a long and serious illness, he talked with him on light topics, played games, described his experiences and there was no pressure of work at all.

Mahadev did not write to Gandhiji after seeing him off. But on the 10th Gandhiji wrote to him, "It seems that a law has been framed in Matheran that you cannot write if I do not write. . . . Your health must remain fine there. . . ."

During those days Mahadev thought a lot. After writing to Narahari on the 10th he calmed down a bit and ruminated over all that had happened. He wondered whether he had been hasty and unjust in forming certain opinions about Gandhiji.

Just then he got Gandhiji's letter. After reading it, his agitation subsided. He started looking at things entirely differently, after thinking about them.²⁹

In this incident Gandhiji did not seem to have been just to Mahadev. But Mahadev's devotion and Gandhiji's love drowned such mental hurt.

Narahari once gave a piece of good news to Mahadev, "Durga is fine. We read *Hind Swaraj* every night. Mani and Durga repeatedly get excited and are ready to take the vow of *swadeshi*. But they are not getting the answer as to how to avoid displeasing the family members on certain occasions. I tell them not to take the pledge till then. But I tell them to put away their foreign clothes on the shelf and start putting on Indian cloth."³⁰

In this way Narahari, as a real friend, wanted to lessen Mahadev's worry about Durga on one hand and on the other, wanted to pour Gandhiji's ideals into Mani's and Durga's minds.

Pleased with Narahari's letter, Mahadev wrote, "You are really serving Durga. I know I cannot be spared from my duties to the Ashram, but that must be my destiny."³¹

Durgaben could stay for about two months and a half with Mahadev at Allahabad. During that time also Mahadev went through a spell of sickness. Both went to Varanasi for a rest of six days. Whenever he got some time Mahadev would take Durga for an outing to Prayag. Sometimes they would read some good literature

together. For Durgaben these days were delightful and full of joy. Away from home, difficulties might have arisen on account of an environment with entirely different customs and manner of living, but Mrs. Joseph was very courageous and friendly. She showered a lot of affection on Durgaben. With the Nehru family too, Durgaben became quite close. It was not possible for Mahadev not to share his joy of pure marital state with Gandhiji. Some parts of a letter written during those days are given here :

"I have started doing a thing quite easily, which you would like. In the morning I walk for fifteen minutes to half an hour in some quiet place where I go by car. Once while returning, I felt tired in the car itself; I got down at Tandonji's house which was on the way, and just dropped down with fatigue. He got a bit scared but I said, 'Give me some quarter seer of good hot milk. I should feel better and then give me some excellent Hindi books with message from saints. We talked a lot. After a glass of milk, he put before me a couple of excellent Sanskrit and Hindi editions of Ramayana, and books by saints like Tulsī, Dadu, Dugal and Kabir. I came back home, fresh and overjoyed. Ramnaresh Tripathi had come there. He gave me his poem, 'Kaumudi' and said, 'If you want to read Hindi these days I will keep on coming in the mornings.' I was happy and told him, 'Do come.' Now since four days I read newspapers, some good monthlies, an English weekly, books of my choice and *bhajans* in which Durga joins me enthusiastically, because she has more guilelessness and purity in her heart than myself, and at times, I am outdone by her in explaining the meaning in Hindi. Yesterday she really astounded me by explaining a stanza. So at present we both are gloriously happy. Ramnareshji comes in the mornings, he explains the difficult sentences, passages and words which helps us to revise our previous day's work, and I am also preparing a small Hindi Dictionary for myself. I am sure you will be happy at my prayerful study of Hindi. Next, I also read profane (not sacred) literature, which is not religious — merely from the point of view of language. At every step I have a feeling that I am giving you inner happiness. An interesting episode of this story has been left out.

"Yesterday, Durga and myself had gone by car for a stroll to a delightful spot on river Jumna. It had become dark. The scene was ineffable — I will sure not describe in this letter — Moon's hazy light was helping my weak eye. Durga could not read. Her one eye even is permanently affected as a result of terminating our enjoyment. Doctors had advised spectacles, but

we did not follow the advice as I did not like to burden her with them as I have been burdened like a bullock with blinkers. In that dim light I was reading poems by Nanak. Some of them were such that they would make your soul jump up with joy. I would just give a few of them. Narsinh Mehta eulogises a morning thus :

A saintly person should not lie abed when it is the last quarter of the night,

Discarding the night, remembering the Lord,

Repeat 'Thou Art, Thou Art'.

Those who renounce should take care of their renunciation.

Pleasure-loving should abandon their pleasure.

"But Nanak has sung the glory of dawn more poetically I remembered you every moment when I was reading it. Here is the poem :

Arise in the last quarter of the night,

When nectar rains and when — in

that blessed hour the soul

gets extra vitality — Arise !

"And what should be done after arising ? He has said it gloriously :

I have trusted in this breath,

He may come or may not,

This world is a night's dream,

Seen sometimes, unseen at others,

Do not think in the mind.

He gets who searches

Nanak searches in the feet of the devotees

The feet of the Lord.

How beautiful !"

The leading article for *The Independent*, written by Mahadev on the day after meeting Motilalji was brilliant. Its heading, "The Government's Madness" explains the article. Here is a small excerpt :

"It is clear that Congress as a parallel Government stings the eyes of people with a slavish mentality. Everyday he realises that power is slipping away from his hands into those of the Congressmen. That is the reason he is possessed by excessive wrath. For us he is like a drowning man clutching at straws."

And at the end of the article he wrote :

"Now a word about ourselves. Motilalji has blessed our effort and has given us his Anand Bhavan palace to use it as an office for the Paper. This would be an adequate notice to our

readers that this Paper has no connection with 'National Journals Ltd.' Only those who were maintaining the old *Independent* can be their owners. But only those who have adopted poverty can own this new one. And the greater advantage is that it is beyond the 'law' of Lord Reading."³²

When Mahadev was served with the notice he immediately informed Motilal by a letter :

"At last I have been fortunate. I will be tried under Section 170 of the Criminal Amendment Act and Section 117 of the Indian Penal Code. Joseph also was tried under the same sections.

"In Anand Bhavan my office is being searched for my article 'Navo Avatar'. Let them do as many evil deeds as they want to. Can I expect to meet you shortly ?"³²

He gave the same news through a note to the readers of *The Independent*.

On the 24th December he was tried under the above-mentioned sections. Durgaben was present in the court. She garlanded her husband and put a kum-kum mark on his forehead. Being together for a period, actual understanding of the work for *The Independent* and her husband's arrest had imbued Durgaben with the spirit of Goddess Durga. Mahadev wrote about Durga with pride :

"My enthusiasm and excitement had no limits when I appeared before the Magistrate on the 24th. I was surprised at my wife's courage when I was going to jail, but she had been used to the idea as it was repeatedly talked about. She asked to accompany me to court. 'If my sentence will be stiff which might make you weep what then ?' She came with Devdas, indicating that she would never insult me and herself by weeping.

"The Police Prosecutor had not come on time. I joked with the Magistrate. Mr. Ben and said, 'Why do you need a Prosecutor? Ask me what you want to and give me the sentence you have decided upon so we can end the chapter.' Mr. Ben smiled and replied, 'I do not know what you are accused of ! So how can the trial go on ?' The Prosecutor came. Everyone was helped by my pleading guilty and within about fifteen minutes the case was over."³³

When the case was being conducted the Magistrate asked Mahadev, "Do you want to cross-examine the witness ?"

Mahadev replied, "No, thank you. They, the Police Officers cannot commit mistakes. How can any one cross-examine them ?"

People like Devdas among the spectators must have smiled at this sarcasm. Otherwise, those to whom this sentence was addressed would not have understood it, even by mistake.

The Judge suggested that the accused may say anything he wanted to Mahadev made the following statement

"It is a clear fact that there is a war going on between us. I am standing here as a war prisoner before you. If we, the non-co-operators were worshippers of violence, like you, I can boldly say that you yourself or some of you would also have been our prisoners in this war. But may God not make us His offenders by making us arrest anyone as a prisoner of war.

"I am also going to help you as did my colleagues before me. Not to oblige you but to be able to go to jail. We all are revolutionaries and the most amazing thing is that instead of conducting a trial for that main offence of not abiding by your law, you are trying to arrest us for small, negligible offences. I do not accept your Criminal Laws of the Governor-General of India in Council, which are not abolished. And so I am prepared to accept the greatest punishment that you can give me. I am only afraid that you are not going to be able to remove the attitude of tremendous revolt against you even if you push us into the deepest valley of hell, nor are you going to succeed in implanting in our minds, hypocrisy of loyalty towards your rotten Government.

"I have to say a few words of thanks before you make me a guest in any of the jails of the King Emperor. Today I will go to jail with a long sigh of relief. I will be free from the tough duty of criticising the Government's doings, rightly, but without rancour. Only my master had developed that capacity. I am really thankful to the Government that I will not have to daily fight these contemptible inclination of my mind of condemning the Government actions. I am also thankful because if your jail-rules allow me, I shall spend my time in doing better work than what I am doing here, for instance I shall spin. And in spite of any number of rules, I shall be devotedly thinking about my Creator. I thank you."³⁴

The sentence was passed the very same day. Before passing the sentence the Magistrate asked, "I forgot to ask you if you want to defend yourself or not!" Mahadev said, "I do not see any reason for asking this question." The Magistrate clarified, "I am asking you merely because I have got to ask you. I have got to do my duty."

The Magistrate did his duty by passing a sentence of one year's imprisonment and a fine of Rs 100/ and a month's added imprisonment in case of non-payment of fine. Thus the chapter that began with journalism ended with imprisonment.

Mahadev developed into an excellent journalist. But the chance of working in the beginning for papers like *Young India*, *Navajivan*

and *The Independent*, were the foundation of his training as a journalist. As far back in 1918 on finding another journalist deficient in his reporting Bapu had said :

“Is that what you call covering a movement ? . . . Day-to-day reports must look like a running commentary. There must be a linking up of the second and so on, so as to make all of them an interesting chapter in History I forgot the name Russel probably but his reports on ‘The Expedition to Peking’ were so picturesque that the readers used to be thrilled. Then there was Edwin Arnold who has written letters entitled, ‘Japan By Land And Sea’. They too are as charming.”³⁵

In the later years when historians wrote history on the basis of Mahadev’s reports the aptitude of Gandhiji’s faith in him was proved. The journalism practised by Gandhiji and Mahadev supported the values established by the free press and introduced some new values. It was proved that if behind a periodical, brought out with the lowest cost, there is the strength of truth and non-violence, it becomes capable of shaking the foundation of a great Empire.

In Gandhiji’s message for the Paper *The Independent* when it started a few months before Mahadev joined it, the seeds of the established Gandhian values in journalism are evident.

“In wishing you success in your new enterprise I would like to say how I hope your writings would be worthy of the title you have chosen for your journal, and may I further hope that to a robust independence you will add an equal measure of self restraint and the strictest adherence to truth ? Too often in our journals as in others do we get fiction instead of fact and declamation in place of sober reasoning. You would make *The Independent* a power in the land and a means of education for the people by avoiding the errors I have drawn attention to.”³⁶

Gandhiji’s periodicals established a tradition of truthfulness. Exaggeration or excess of entertainment do not go well together with healthy journalism. The value of truth for good journalism in the land was established.

When truth is expressed, it can be hard, but there should not be any hatred, envy, contempt, or enmity in it; this was also an added value established by Gandhiji’s papers. The paper that searches for truth should not be insistent for only its own opinion, it should try to understand the opponent’s view as well and publish it without twisting it, as it originally was and then answer it if necessary. Fear and truthful journalism cannot go hand in hand. This truth was accepted by many other papers because of these periodicals.

People understood that restraint in language is also a virtue worth cultivating on account of these papers. That there can be no place for vulgarity, rudeness, or baseness in the language was also an example set.

Truth should be fully supported by knowledge. How to go to the origin of one item of news or a thought and how does that news or thought compare with other worldly currents also was displayed through these papers. C. F. Andrews compared the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre with 'Glancoe' event. Mahadev immediately presented to the readers the history of the 17th Century Scotland's Glancoe and compared both the events. After learning about the details published by the Jallianwala Bagh Inquiry Committee, Mahadev felt that this massacre made Glancoe seem quite harmless. He noted in his diary -

"When Mr. Andrews compared the Jallianwala Bagh event with the notorious Massacre of Glancoe, I immediately published in *Young India* Mr. Andrews' comment as well as a short account of that gruesome episode. Though I published it simply to show how deeply disgusted Mr. Andrews was with the Jallianwala affair, I felt on re-reading it that Mr. Andrews' comparison was a little overdrawn and unjust and I felt very unhappy at having given currency to it. I saw Principal Rudra and he, too, agreed with me. But now I see the perfect propriety of Andrews' comparison. If anything, the Jallianwala Massacre was even more heinous and more worthy of condemnation than the Massacre of Glancoe, since there is a world of difference between the stages of civilization then and now."³⁷

A Satyagrahi journalist tries to find out the root of the truth. He refuses to do injustice even to the opponent and he does not ignore the consciousness about the country and time as well.

These papers gave many examples of journalistic battles against the dominating Empire. By bringing out a hand-written issue of *The Independent* Mahadev made a mark in Indian journalism. This hand-written issue was not like an underground pamphlet. It was a fearless Satyagrahi issue brought out openly declaring the name and everything in spite of the press having been confiscated. They were ready to bear any consequences.

A new method was adopted in these papers of not accepting any advertisements. These papers made our country's journalism rich, healthy, and lasting because of these characteristics.

Mahadev could make an invaluable contribution to Indian journalism because he did it as a duty. He did it as an humble obligation. Journalism was not his profession. We might come across journalists who might have written much more than Mahadev

and researchers who delved deeper. But that journalism would not give the repute and value as that of Mahadev's journalism. When some work ceases to be a profession and becomes a duty, a qualitative change occurs therein. Mahadev's journalism was an example of this qualitative gift.

FOOTNOTES

1. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 239
2. Ibid. p. 395
3. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. I, p. 5
4. *Collected Works of Vallabhbhai Patel*, Chopra, Vol. 1, p. 356 (selected)
5. From the hand-written correspondence - Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya - Sabarmati
6. *CWMG* Vol. 16, p. 146
7. Ibid. Vol. 20, pp. 500-501
8. Ibid. p. 501
9. Ibid. pp. 501, 502
10. Ibid. p. 516
11. Ibid. p. 516
12. *M. D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, p. 19 (Guj.)
13. *CWMG*, Vol., 21, pp. 46-47
14. Ibid. p. 307
15. *M. D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, p. 21 (Guj.)
16. *CWMG*, Vol-21, pp.399-400
17. From the Correspondence—Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
18. *M. D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, p. 94 (Guj.)
19. *CWMG*, Vol. 22, p. 59
20. Ibid. p. 80
21. Issue of *Young India*, 25th December 1921
22. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadev Desai — Smritichitro*, p. 92
23. *CWMG*, Vol. 22, p. 90
24. *M. D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 97 to 100
25. Ibid., pp. 100-102
26. From the Correspondence—Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid. From a hand-written letter of 11th June 1919
29. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa. Mahadev Desai — Smritichitro*, pp. 61 to 67 (selected)
30. From Correspondence—Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
31. Ibid.
32. *M. D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 105-106 (Guj.)
33. Ibid. p. 164 (Guj.)
34. Ibid. pp. 107 to 109
35. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 1, pp. 129-30
36. Ibid. p. 285
37. Ibid. Vol. III, pp. 172-73

THE LIGHT

“Thou Art the Light,
 Give me Light,
Thou Art Energy,
 Endow me with Energy.
Thou Art Strength,
 Bestow upon me Thy Strength.
Thou Art Righteous Indignation,
 Teach me to be righteously indignant.
Thou Art Tolerance,
 Let me be tolerant ”

(Yajurveda : 19-9)

“When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust,
Oh Thou Holy One ! Thou Wakeful One ! Come with Thy
 Light and Thy Thunder.
— *Rabindranath Tagore*

CHAPTER XX

JAIL — SATYAGRAHI'S PLACE OF PENANCE

The police-van came and waited. Mahadev and Durga took leave of each other, Mahadev with a smile, Durga a bit seriously. Naini Jail is not far from Allahabad. On crossing the city you come to the bridge over the river Jamuna. A glimpse towards the north from over the bridge gives you a view of the flow of the Ganga. Before embracing Ganga, Kalindi becomes serious and slow in her advance. The bridge is not very far from that most holy of places, Prayag, the confluence of the rivers. There are green fields beyond the Jamuna and then begins the boundary of the Allahabad Central Jail. Its high walls hinder the surrounding greenery. From quite a distance you can see the dreadful iron bars fixed on the gigantic gates of thick wood which had been erected there to frighten the new entrants. But Mahadev was smiling. His long-standing desire had been fulfilled that day. That is why he wrote to Motilalji that at last that happy moment had come. Here is the description from Mahadev's pen of the entire situation at the time when Gandhiji sent him to Allahabad to work for *The Independent*, the time when he took up its editorship and later on when he was arrested :

"Good that your body was raw — where would it have fallen had it been ripe ?"

— *Arjun Bhagat*

"In November 1921 the Central Government and all the provincial Governments were in a fit of passion. The Prince of Wales had come to the country and that he was not welcomed anywhere by the people was intolerable for them. The Government had assured the British Government that the Prince of Wales will get a pleasant welcome in spite of the country's strong opposition to inviting him. The moment the Prince of Wales disembarked on the coast of India, they realised that their hope of a welcome forced on the people was belied. Because of this failure it could be said that the Government had

become rather rabid. In most of the provinces laws were passed banning the volunteer-corps. In the former law there was no prohibition in becoming a volunteer or enrolling volunteers, and so the people wondered about these sudden laws and decided to oppose them, even without a resolution of the Congress Committee. Just to oppose this law thousands of volunteers enrolled at many places. The Government got further irritated. They adopted a policy of arresting the leaders. On the 6th of December eleven leaders including Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr. Joseph and Purushottamdas Tandon were arrested. More were arrested the next day. Gandhiji had sent me to Allahabad to replace Mr. Joseph, when four months ago it was rumoured that he was arrested.

"Mr. Joseph was not arrested at that time, but was arrested this time and it was my turn to get my name announced as the Editor of *The Independent*. At that time Gandhiji was expecting day and night to be arrested, but it was not on the cards, as he believed that the more the sacrifice of the purest type, the better it would be for the movement. And so he desired that his closest and dearest associates should go to prison. He sent a congratulatory telegram when the Nehru family was arrested and wrote to me at the same time, 'Get a nice message from Motilalji's wife and get it published, and now you also hasten to jail.' He wrote as if the jail was our home." After this every alternate day there were letters from Gandhiji which contained suggestions about the work, praise or criticism about my articles as well as a last sentence saying, 'Why are you still free?' I had answered him that, 'My articles were not written with a view to keep out of jail, and I had also become volunteer.' In the meantime Devdas came to help me. So we both started getting messages, 'Why have you not gone to jail yet?'

"At this time Sir Harcourt Butler uttered a sentence in a lecture, 'We will teach you a lesson.' In answer to this I printed in bold black letters, 'We will also really teach you a lesson', and printed signatures of hundreds of volunteers, underneath. The Government took the hint and confiscated the bail amount for *The Independent* on the 21st for printing Swaruprani Nehru's message and the article of the pledges. Gandhiji saw some ray of hope in this and sent a congratulatory telegram with the suggestion of bringing out a hand-written paper. That suggestion was immediately acted upon. Next day the hand-written paper was brought out. All the copies were sold. Actually we did not have enough appliances to fulfil people's

demand God alone knows how far it was true, but it was told by many that my small paper was read out on the telephone from Allahabad to Sir Harcourt who was then in Lucknow. I was also told that there was no possibility of my staying free. And it happened exactly that way. The very next day I got the summons to present myself before the Magistrate. I had not hoped that I would be rewarded so soon for my services. I had written my narration that very morning. The condition of non-co-operators written in that short narration was just as narrated then and it is so even to-day according to my belief. There is no reason to withdraw even a single word from that."

On entering the jail Mahadev realised that the whole planning there was to reduce the animate to the inanimate. The whole system was built on the irrational belief that a man can improve only through fear, terror and beating.

Durgaben almost followed the police-van to the jail. With her was Devdas Gandhi who was like a younger brother-in-law. Later on Gandhiji published Devdas's letter without printing his name :

"Yesterday we went to the jail, but could not get an interview. We had taken some eatables, books and a covering, but they were returned to us by the jailor. We could, however, meet Mahadev this morning.

"He was kept with ordinary criminals and had to observe all jail rules. He was given jail uniform, comprising a black half shirt and half pant. This uniform is extremely dirty with a foul smell and is full of lice. He has been given two blankets, which have not been washed for many months. They are also full of lice.

"He has been provided a rusty iron pot for water. The rust poisons the water every time the pot is filled. No water can be kept in the pot for drinking at night. It becomes yellow by morning.

"There is a dirty water tank for bathing. The same water is used for drinking. There is a loin cloth for bathing, but no towel is supplied for drying the body. You have to dry yourself in the sun and put on the same dirty uniform that you had taken off. It is impossible for a man of Mahadev's delicate constitution to wash his clothes with a wet body and remain semi-naked until the clothes are dried.

"The food too is the ordinary jail food. Yesterday he ate at home and so took nothing in the jail at night. Today in the morning some crude porridge-like substance was served. He took it, but it was full of grit and mud-particles.

"You have to go out in the open for easing yourself. The water to be used on the occasion has to be carried in the same pot that is used for drinking. This too kept open like the drinking pot. Mahadev has not yet been fettered."

Mahadev's father burst into tears when he read this account and said, 'Mahadev has never suffered any misery in life, nor had he to contend with hardship. How can he pass a whole year in such a prison?'²

In his letter of consolation to the father, Gandhiji wrote

"It is good that Mahadev is jailed. He will get rest thereby. The work outside is so heavy, that he would have fallen ill. Although there is hardship in jail now, I am sure that conditions will improve very soon. Mahadev has a knack of winning over people wherever he goes. I am sure that by speaking sweetly and modestly he will have any undue hardship in jail life removed. You should neither lose patience nor worry."³

Mahadev had written an illegal letter from the Naini Jail in which he has described the condition of some prisoners, which created much stir. Some excerpts follow:

"I was brought to Naini Jail on the afternoon of the 24th. When I was produced before the Superintendent, he said, angrily, 'You may be a non-co-operator or whatever, here you are a prisoner like other prisoners and so you would be kept like any other prisoner.' . . .

". . . I had already decided to accept fetters or anything else happily, also to put on prisoners' clothes, so I put them on as soon as they were given to me . . . I had thought that in jail, I will sleep soundly after being completely tired, but the lice continued to sting me from the blanket. . . . From 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. every fifteen minutes, we, prisoners, were counted in an uproarious voice, loud enough to rent the skies. So sleep was not possible. But I was sure to be able to sleep the next day if not that day because hunger and sleep take their toll regardless of matter and place.

"I did not eat anything in the evening because I was not hungry. A big steel-bowl had been given for food and water. In spite of it being vigorously cleaned, in the morning it was full of water, red with rust. For the natural calls and for drinking water we used to be taken out of the cell thrice a day. For water there was a cement tank, from which we had to take water by dipping our bowls. . . . For bathing a long cement pipe came out of that tank where we had to take our bath together. For food we used to get a sort of porridge of ground

wheat and gram-flour and *dal*, and in the evening roti and vegetable. How do I evaluate this food with my likes and dislikes? It could not be called 'unfit for human consumption' as other prisoners ate well.

"... I had washed my shirt and other clothes by smearing mud by staying bare-bodied for two days and so the foul smell had almost gone. . . . Just then we had the news that the Government had ordered that I should be classified as a political prisoner. When my co-prisoners were doing hard labour, my pleasure of becoming purer and more lustrous through hard labour as well as daily torment, was snatched away. The clothes I had worn when I had come to Jail and with which I was decked when Durga and Devdas came for the interview to prevent Durga from getting shocked by my prison-garb, were returned to me. But how can they return the Gandhi-cap? The Superintendent asked, 'What is a Gandhi-cap?' He could not explain, but he said, 'You cannot be allowed to wear the cap you are wearing.' Change the shape. Or else put on a Fez cap like that of Mr. Sherwani.' I laughed and said, 'I would neither change the shape, nor put on a Fez cap.' 'Then you would have to go bare-headed.' I said, 'I don't mind.' I felt like telling him that I would not put on any clothes, but I acceded to the order of obeying all orders.

"... There was a custom of keeping a new prisoner locked up for ten days without any work. So those friends from the Provincial Committee and myself used to read a book given to us during the day without doing any work, every morning I heard the bitter words of the Jailor and the Superintendent. . . . Next day I told the Superintendent, 'Give us a spinning-wheel or get it for us from our home.' He replied, 'Spinning-wheel is given to women. We have to spend about ten rupees for you. We have got to produce ten rupees from your labour and that can only come from work like grinding.' I said, 'If you have sense you can even get Rs 500/- from our work.' He got annoyed and said, 'Should I make you write articles?'

"... A steel collar was fixed round the necks of those whose term was over, an amulet of wood with the section of offence was tied, a steel ring was already there in the leg. . . .

"... There is a boy of seventeen or eighteen named Karlasnath, son of a famous lawyer of Kanpur; he is a political prisoner. Being religious, he eats only after a bath, prayers and putting on a sandalmark on his forehead. His sandal and other things were allowed to be brought in by the Jailor, but once when he saw the mark he ordered, 'What is this on your

forehead? Wipe it off.' The boy wiped it off, but did not eat. Once again the Jailor came. The boy was threatened and told to eat but as he refused, he was badly thrashed by a stick, kicked with shoes . . . and was showered with abuses. . . .

" . . . One of the fifteen friends was held. The inspector attacked him like a wild animal, he abused him horribly, went on beating him with a rod and a stick shouting, 'Take this, go ahead and shout *Gandhiji-ki-jai*!' That man's extremely strong body also broke down after ten blows of 1½" thick rod. Even when he fell down he was beaten with fists . . .

" . . . Other enraged prisoners went on shouting *Gandhiji-ki-jai* and so nearly fifty to sixty of them were mercilessly beaten. As if this punishment was not enough, all the prisoners were taken out of the cells next morning . . . the two prisoners who were suspect were tied by their hands to a board and flogged. This flogging was so terrible that the screams were heard in my cell which is two or three furlongs away. When the man became unconscious after some lashes, he was revived and flogged again. These two were given twenty three lashes. It is worth noting that with every lash they shouted, *Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai*. Those who were beaten, continued to shout *jai* even when the Superintendent, the Jailor and others were watching them. They only stopped when the beating stopped. After this other three or four people were beaten not with a cane but with fists and lathis. One person was so badly beaten that he even passed urine and stool at the spot."

After the episode of this terrible beating when the Jailor came to see him, Mahadev said,

" . . . Today is a day of fast and prayer for me. . . . I would pray for my friends, because initially they did not commit a mistake, regarding not following the rules of the jail, but my prayers would be specially for those who have beaten them with hatred."⁴

There was a lot of turmoil in the United Provinces on account of the mean treatment meted out to Mahadev. Sir Lallubhai Shamaldas wrote a letter to the Viceroy. This resulted in his being considered a special prisoner and all conveniences were given to him. Mahadev had had to put up with the former inhuman treatment for about ten days.

Sometime later he was transferred to Agra Jail. There, as he was considered a political prisoner, he got considerable freedom.

Mahadev was allowed to write in Gujarati, but the jail officials did not know the language. Had he written a letter in Gujarati, it would have been handed over to the secret police - C I D. He did not

feel like writing to Gandhiji in English. After a lot of mental anguish, he wrote the following letter in English :

9-1-1922

"My dearest and Most Revered Bapuji,

It is after a considerable mental struggle that I have mustered courage to write to you. I was feeling so awkward, as I am feeling even now, writing to you in English, but I have decided after all to choose the least evil out of many. I was given, no doubt, the option to write in Urdu — which I do not know; to write in Hindi, which I would not, as the letter would have to be read by men here in whose judgment I have no opinion; to write in Gujarati but to allow the letter to get into the hands of the C I D. who may not send the letter to you for weeks together. The least of the evils was to write in English, and to submit it to the Superintendent who now understands me, and whom I see no objection to submitting it. I dare say, even after this long explanation you will not at all like my having written to you in English. But I wish I could tell you how very much against my will I am doing so. I have, as you know, always felt a sort of embarrassment, in thinking in English even with the people, in your presence. The embarrassment is all the greater when I have to write in English to you. But I expect you will reconcile yourself to the inevitable. The Government will compel us to do so many odd things, and we will be content to do them, so long as they are not against our moral self. I do not think that writing in English to one's countrymen, even to one's nearest and dearest, is so heinous a sin as, for instance, wearing foreign clothes after having VOWED not to wear them. But I must close this long prelude.

"I have been having a delightful time here. I really think my imprisonment did not come a day too soon. I was so much driven you know, and I badly needed rest. And that I have had here in plenty — plenty of space to move about — at any rate plenty of place to pace up and down and make my ten miles a day, plenty of books — religious only (politics is taboo, of course; but the Superintendent does not know the variety of my interests), plenty of food and fresh air; plenty of sleep, when there is no anxiety to rack the brow. Not that the pleasant monotony of the time was quite unbroken by unpleasant experiences but I have had sufficient nerve by now to live them down.

"But I dare not give you a picture of the life here. And for many reasons. A true picture would be censored, for one thing, then it is impossible for me in a foreign tongue to let myself go

as I would in Gujarati; I could hardly resist the temptation of getting humorous and I have not yet achieved the art of indulging in humour at nobody's expense, or rather without hurting anyone. And Devdas I suppose has written to you a lot about me, because he had three interviews with me here. For a week I was an ordinary convict in ordinary convict clothes which I dare say Devdas has described to you — but not doing the convicts' work. No hard or light labour was imposed upon me. The next week I was transferred to the political prisoners' ward and I got my books and bed and clothes, with the exception, of course, of the 'Gandhi Cap', a term which the Superintendent, who objected to my using it, could not define. I was given the task of making 500 envelopes a day — a very light one, though hardly pleasant — but even that was not for long. I freed myself from that monotonous job as soon as I learned that that only availed to get me just a little more rations, a thing quite superfluous to me, as the limited rations I was getting were quite sufficient for me. But I asked instead to be allowed to do spinning. I did it on the day of my being admitted here, but the request was refused on the score of the work not being paying enough, and every prisoner was expected to put in 10 Rupees worth of labour, as he costs the jail that much! As a political prisoner the dignity of a higher status was imposed on me and I repeated the request. This time the request was refused for a more appreciable reason. 'You know the political significance of the wheel!' And as I have had, these days, all my time to myself and I feel I have turned it to fairly good account, I have done a good deal of reading. Glover's *Jesus of History* — a book of abounding interest, and have also done a good deal of the Bible in the light thereof. I have begun seriously reading the Ramayana — Tulsī — too, and Kabir's *bhajans* and *slokas* from Bhagvadgita serve as memory exercises whilst I have my morning and evening walks. I have, as you might well imagine, regularly done my prayers, regularly retired at the time appointed by you, and been out of bed at the sacred hour when, as Nanak says, the 'Heavens rain nectar'. I have had a life quite after my heart, a life of regimen and diet, a life of religious study and meditation. And yet not a life of toil — not a life in which I did any bread labour excepting the washing of my clothes and cleaning utensils. I was not allowed to cook for myself. I wish the Superintendent knew what a consummate cook I am, having once obtained the certificate in the culinary art from no less a man than 'Mahatma Gandhi'. I was quite ready to cook for all

the political prisoners here. But incendiaries cannot be trusted with fire ! Though I see that Govind and Krishna Kant who joined us the other day have been allowed to cook for themselves; but that is because they are orthodox Hindus. I have had therefore all play and no work. And nobody is to blame. Why should we take thought for the morrow prisoners at any rate, of all people in the world ? And I should not grumble for not being allowed the spinning-wheels. The jail authorities knew that I was reading the Bible, and they expected me, I imagine, to consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin^s. I do hope I have grown as the happy lilies in the field.

"But it appears as though the fates have conspired not to allow me their restful ease and quiet any longer. I had begun to feel my ground here, I had established a perfect understanding between the Jail authorities and myself. I dare say I had begun winning their sympathy and regard. I was even trying to make my point of view and way of life understood and appreciated by them. When lo ! Comes the bolt all of a sudden. We are told this morning by the Superintendent that all the political prisoners, including myself and Krishna Kant and Govind (whom Government have further disgraced by reducing their sentences to 6 months simple) would be removed tomorrow to Agra District Jail. I have called this a bolt. I do not know what life awaits me there. I am told that still the political prisoners are being herded together, to conspire, I suppose, to their hearts content, but to be out of harm's way so far as ordinary convicts are concerned, for they are segregated. I like the segregation in the interest and a punishment, no less than the segregation in the colonies. That is one aspect of the curse, and the lighter one. The more material aspect touches my personal comforts. I had all the time to myself here, I do not expect to get it there. Durga and Devdas could see me occasionally, and they can do it no longer now. Durga had the comfort of feeling that I was within negotiable distance from her and she will now have none.

"But I know that I am sinning in letting these thoughts cross my mind. We are not in for comforts. We are in for all sorts of hardships and hardships we have had none. (Some of the fortunate ones here had, and theirs is so much the better and the purer sacrifice.) And it is being borne in upon me. The struggle before us requires sacrifice of still truer and nobler type. Mine has been an easy one, if it at all can be described by that name. And whilst in this connection, I may tell you how

much I have sorrowed, how many wakeful hours I have had, over a careless sentence that I perpetrated in my telegram to you, after the imprisonment. The memory of that boastful sentence, 'I hope I am now worthy of you' still rankles in my breast. I do not think you have forgiven me for that. The sentence in itself contained the proof of my unworthiness. If I had reviewed the telegram, I think the most I could have said would have been, 'Think am now on a firm way of becoming worthy of you'. How I wish the memory of that childish boast could be effaced. But I know it cannot be. 'The moving finger writes', says Omar Khayyam, 'and having writ, moves on; nor all the piety and wit, nor all thy tears can cancel half a line or blot a word out of it'. I will have to live many more years, if not many more births, to be worthy of you. I am optimistic enough to feel that I am on a fair way. The process has begun. The work of scavenging initiated by you, is being continued by me. I am feeling every day I am moving if ever so little, I am every day adding to my capacity of loving and I dare say the deficiency in my religious education will, if continued, help considerably in the process. Would you please tell Saraladevi that I am feeling towards her as a brother and to request her to send me, if she can conveniently part with it, for a time, her grand set of Browning's Works, to the care of the Superintendent, District Jail Agra? Also ask you to send me that little book you are carrying about with you, *From an Unknown Disciple* as also the *Life of St Francis of Assisi* which Prof. Mackenzie presented to you. I dare say I shall be allowed to have a large stock of books even in Agra. My days are passed among the saints nowadays, and I should love to finish as well as I can my knowledge of the Bible, the Saints (including Christian Saints of course), the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (including of course the Bhagvad Gita). I have some secular literature, no doubt, but that takes frankly, a subordinate place. The memorising of songs and verses is a grand thing — It puts us in mind of the great times when our men and women lived and moved as men and women and carried the treasure of all their religious and philosophical lore in the impregnable fortress of their memories. And I think whilst in this connection, of Vinoba and the juvenile band that is growing under him. How I wish I had been brought up and grown under such influence. And I need not tell you how helpful these memorised treasure would be if we are to be put into solitary cells!

"But I must close. I must spare the Superintendent the infliction of any more random talk. As it is, he thinks that we have been troublesome enough to him — not we, all political prisoners — and I can imagine with what delight he hailed the orders of our removal. It does mean a load of worries off his hand. And just in exultation of that happy event, he was kind enough to extend me the courtesy of writing no less than two letters at a time. He could well afford to allay the discipline for this first and last time.

"And now I wish we could remove the load of anxiety from off the shoulders not only of jail authorities, but of the whole of the unwanted Government. Mr. Knox, the Collector, who knows me and who was on a visit here the other day hoped and reciprocated the hope that we would meet as friends very soon. When I reciprocated the hope he said, 'It all depends on you.' I said, 'I am a prisoner. It cannot depend on me.' 'Well it depends on Mr. Gandhi,' he said smilingly and did not stay for a retort from me. Gandhi says it all depends on Government, Government says it all depends on Gandhi."

"I have once again started talking away. I have no idea how it would be in Agra, but I do hope we would like it. My life as a whole has been fairly happy. Can The Tajmahal not be changed into a prison for the political prisoners? But more when I write to you next. As for now,

Heartfelt *pranaams* from your
Mahadev"⁶

"Now I think I can write in Gujarati as much as I would want to — because I have got the person who will post this letter. I had kept a copy of the letter I wrote to you with an intention of getting it posted to you if my letter was not sent to you by the jail authorities. You could say that such a letter should not be sent. The Superintendent considers the non co-operators his enemies. I have brought him round merely by good humour and now his behaviour with me is excellent. If I get the chance of writing in the train, I would send a nice letter in Gujarati. Just now I do not have time to write one word more.

"I do want one letter from you. I have not set eyes on a single letter from you for the last fifteen days.

Respectful *pranaams* from
Your devotee Mahadev."⁷

The day after writing this letter, Mahadev wrote another letter from the train on his way to Agra from Naini, in which he gave a

vivid description of the tortures inflicted upon the prisoners in jail. Here are some important excerpts :

"Near Itawa, On the Way to Agra,
10th Morning.

"I am experiencing the feelings of a person who emerges into open air from a dark room, where he had been suffocated and irritated. You can imagine how I am longing to write to you according to my habit of almost daily writing to you and thus solving many of my mental problems. How to hope to write to you, when only one letter was permitted every fortnight, that too in English, to be sent through the Superintendent, written in a dark cell? But last night we were released — at least till we reach Agra — and this morning we are on the way to Agra.

"At night 39 of us were driven from Naini in a prison van, nearly six feet broad, ten feet long, each of four partitions with steel-bars closed from within. As if that was not enough, for added security the prison van had no doors or windows. There were some holes — one inch in diameter — on the side of the van for air. I asked the Sergeant who was taking us, 'You do not want to repeat the Mopala story, do you?' He replied innocently, 'It would not matter much as it is not summer. Had it been summer, it would have been unbearable.' Over and above our four compartments there was a fifth compartment with doors and windows like an ordinary third class compartment. That was for our police friends. To keep us suffocated, they at least must have full air and light, isn't it so?

"Devdas and Durga had come to meet us at Allahabad station. They could hardly see us but both of them came to the side where they could stand outside and we could talk to our heart's content. I gave the information about the horrors to Devdas from the dark prison van, which I had not been able to give from jail, because the policemen who had come with us do not officiate as jailors. And so before you get this letter, most of this information would have appeared in Devdas's *The Independent*.

"We hardly slept at about one or two o'clock at night when we were woken up at Kanpur at four in the morning. The Sergeant said, 'Desai, Govind, and Krishnakant Malaviya, Shah Saheb and two others come with us, we would accommodate you elsewhere, so that there is some room here.' I could not understand why the seven of us were selected, but I sensed segregation, therefore, I said, 'Any seven of us could come, not the ones you have mentioned.' The Sergeant said, "Only those

people have to come whom I indicate I can put those whom I know in the ordinary compartment with confidence. You have to come out.' We as 'Political Prisoners' had put on our own clothes, but the others except three or four of us had jail clothes, steel-bands round the neck and steel-amulets on the feet. We were all embarrassed. On top of that we had been insulted by being called trustworthy. We got out only when I knew that there were three ordinary prisoners with us and that we would get the opportunity to write a letter to you in good light, which I would not have got anywhere else. I am writing this from an ordinary third-class compartment. There are seven police for seven of us.

"But now I will not prolong this topic, because time is short and there is a lot to do. How can I explain to you that your rule to observe all rules of the prison has confused us. Repeatedly questions arise as to what to obey and what not to obey when daily there are new experiences and various kinds of torments. And so I doubt whether on every occasion I acted correctly from the point of view of obeying all jail laws."

"As the term was over, we were made to put on a steel collar round the neck and a wooden amulet with the section of the offence and the date of the punishment, tied round our arms. We already had the steel-anklet. That day the lice-infested clothes were dropped and new clothes were given. My clothes remained the same. But the foul smell had gone because I had washed the clothes by putting mud and by remaining without them for two days. My friends had picked out the lice from the blankets by spreading them in the sun.

"But I was left alone when the others went, though I am forming close friendships with dacoits and other prisoners. An old man serving a seven-year sentence used to come and sit outside my cell. I used to read the Ramayana and he would comment on it. He had unlimited understanding and knowledge. He could recite the entire Ramayana by heart! Then *bhajans* were sung and many prisoners started sitting around my cell. Here two interesting divisions are made amongst the prisoners. 'India's Prisoners' (ordinary convicts) and the 'Government's Prisoners', those like us. The ordinary prisoners almost worshipped the Government's prisoners and served them.

"When I was thus forming close friendship I received the news of my friends getting hard labour. Each of the eleven had to grind three-fourths of a maund of corn and the Deputy Jailor had instructed the 'convict worker' to trouble them as much as possible so that they might ask for pardon out of sheer

harassment. A couple of them fell sick within two days. All had bruises in the palms but all had reached 17 to 18 seers a day. Just then I was told that the Government had ordered to change my status to that of a 'political prisoner'. I was sad. When my colleagues were doing hard labour, my pleasure of purifying myself and becoming more lustrous through immense torment, was snatched away."⁹

Before printing the entire letter in the issue of *Navajivan* of 15th January 1922, Gandhiji wrote the following note :

"I reproduce below a letter from Shri Mahadev Desai, leaving out only the salutation and the signature. I believe that the posting of the letter was a breach of jail discipline. In South Africa, I refused even to act upon such letters, but in this case I feel that Mahadev Desai's harmless breach of a rule is pardonable. There is no other way to expose in time the Dyerism being practised in jails. If anyone suffers for his indiscipline, it will be Mahadev himself. I will not mind if he, too, like Lakshminarayan, is flogged till he gets sores on the back. Mahadev did right in taking this risk and writing. If at any time the Government gives the slightest latitude to prisoners, they may put it to good use as Mahadev had done in writing this letter. I do not at present wish to comment upon the facts given in it. At the moment, I am simply bathing in a sea of joy and amazement at the courage and restraint displayed by the country. I had not hoped for this degree of self-purification. The prisoners' cries of victory, were not in a spirit of defiance but because they believed that they had a right to do so. When Mahadev drew Lakshminarayan's attention to the error, how candidly did he admit it at once? Truly, God's hand is behind our struggle."¹⁰

Mahadev made the first prison his place of penance as a Satyagrahi for thirteen months. A Satyagrahi broke the law, but was ready to joyfully bear the harassment which followed it. He did not harbour hatred, anger, or enmity towards the instrument or the system that is responsible for the injustice. On the contrary, he harboured slightly more compassion and affection than usual so that they could also be made to realise the hidden injustice of the system. He took care to observe the common rules of the system. Nevertheless, he was ready to undergo any punishment because he openly opposed the rules that were unjust, oppressive or inhuman. His conduct with fellow prisoners — political or criminal — was cordial and affectionate. He considered the prison as a laboratory for arranging the human relationships, even with the jail officials, in the proper direction. Most significant of all was that he considered the

prison sentence an opportunity to purify himself. He did not waste a single minute during the day, kept on testing his each step from the point of view of truth and non-violence and kept on with the effort of becoming purer every day. Mahadev did not leave any stone unturned in doing all these things. He spent the free time from prison work in studying many subjects — determined of course by the type and the number of books available in jail.

We saw that the beginning of his prison stay started with stiff physical torment. Gandhiji wrote in the note alongside the smuggled letter printed verbatim in the issue of *Young India* of 5th January 1922, "Latimer must never have felt the torment when he proudly flung his hand in the fire." Latimer was a Protestant reformer of England. The Conservatives tied him to a pole and burnt him alive. About this reference, Mahadev wrote to Gandhiji from Shikohabad during travel. "Pyarelal conveyed to me yesterday from the air-hole of the police van your good wishes expressed through the example of Latimer. Bless me that God may give me the opportunity to be tested as Latimer was." A Satyagrahi asked for blessings to purify himself to a greater degree by going through more torment.

Mahadev felt greatly relieved even by looking at "Blessings from Bapu" in someone else's letter. But fortunately a greater freedom had been given in relation to writing and receiving letters in the Agra Jail. Gandhiji printed Mahadev's letter written in January 1922 in the issue of *Navajivan* of 19th January 1922 :

"We have been resting in peace here. The condition has improved since I wrote to you last. Peace and order is being established everywhere.

"Just now some volunteers from Mathura are performing a sacrifice, and I can hear the incantations from the *Vedas*. More people have been participating in the morning prayers that I had started. Joseph also participates. Along with the Ashram prayers, *Vaishnava Jana* or *Tun Dayal Din Haun* was sung and the prayers ended with a patriotic song. From today Joseph has been joining us and he recited from the Bible, sang a hymn and made us sing. All have really liked *Vaishnava Jana* and everyone will commit it to memory."

Describing his daily routine Mahadev wrote, "I regularly read the *Rāmāyana* in the early morning with Ramnaresh Tripathi. Then I read the *Bhagvad Gītā*." Regarding his partners he wrote, "Joseph did not seem very busy, but at night he studied special economics. He could easily hope to become the finance minister after independence." Khwaja Abdul Majid, Principal of Jamia Milia Islamia was in the same prison. Mahadev wrote about him, "Khwaja has established his home there. I was charmed with his joyful nature.

Even you would be surprised at his observance of the vow of Swadeshi. He would have bread and butter only from Aligarh. His Khadi is spun and woven at home. His ink is from Khwaja Brothers of Aligarh. The stove is made by an iron-monger of Aligarh on the pattern shown by Mrs. Khwaja, and his spinning-wheel is made at Aligarh. His handwriting is beautiful and neat like the engraved Arabic letters on the Taj Mahal. He has decorated the walls of his barrack by writing excellent words from the Quran on small card-boards with beautiful, colourful, handwriting. He has created a masjid in jail in a small corner by spreading a mattress and putting a couple of cushions on it. Occasionally he lights incense. He is fond of fine arts and as there is no dearth of poets in the North-Western part of the United Provinces, sometimes recites a line of a poem and invites others to complete it. This is called *Mushaira*. And in Khwaja Sahab's *Mushaira*, not only Muslims but Hindu friends like Krishnakant Malaviya and Ramnaresh Tripathi also join in."

Then Mahadev switched the topic to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's son. "Krishnakanti had terrible addiction to *pan*. Some one asked him before imprisonment, 'What will you do if you do not get *pan* in jail?' He said, 'Maybe the imprisonment will help me get rid of the addiction.' But unfortunately jail has not helped him to forget his addiction. He did not get *pan* for two days at Allahabad but here he gets 200 *pans* daily. Govind and myself are trying to free him from the habit."

Rajbahadur from Eta was also a prisoner. About him he wrote: "I should not forget Rajbahadur Sahab. It can be said that we are sheltered by him. I do not know whether you know him or not. When we had been to Eta he had not joined non-co-operation. But we had our food at his place. He has a number of titles and was running a number of Government organisations. There was a lot of agitation in the Government when he joined non-co-operation because he holds the key to the whole of Eta district. He is the oldest member here. If I say that he looks after our food and health like a mother, it covers all his virtues."

Mahadev had started spinning in jail, but he was not satisfied with his progress. Khwaja Sahab got two spinning-wheels from Aligarh but both did not function properly. A third one was somewhat better. Mahadev got one from the Sabarmati Ashram.

Mahadev learned from Durga, when she came for an interview that Jawaharlal had progressed well in spinning. Mahadev wrote to him:

"I wanted to ask you if you could send me a good spindle! I felt very proud when Durga told me that you had spun some pounds of cotton in jail. As for me it is the spinning-

wheel which has put me in a dilemma for the first time in my life. Nevertheless, I have been after it for the last two months, still I have not crossed the trial stage. Quite often the slivers are bad, the yarn keeps on snapping, once the spindle was crooked, and thus there is no end to my troubles. I could not say that it is not the case of finding fault with circumstances because I do not want to do such a thing. How nice it would have been had you been here to help me and guide me in my difficulties?"

This letter of 2nd May (1922) had been written for 'mere gossip'. When Jawaharlal came to Agra he had asked for an interview with Mahadev, but he failed to get it. Mahadev had expressed his disappointment over it. When he did not get Gandhiji's letters, Mahadev thought that Gandhiji had avoided to write with a view not to make any exception in his case regarding jail rules. When he thought about Gandhiji's rules, Mahadev shuddered at the extra liberty he had taken in writing to Jawaharlal. He accepted that he had broken quite a few rules about writing letters but said that quite often the jail officials had helped him. And he said, "I have kept a good bit of control over myself. I have utilised my time purposefully and have kept myself under quite a lot of discipline."

In a photograph taken near the gates of Agra Jail, we can see Mahadev, Khwaja Saheb, Rajabahadur and Joseph, in a standing pose. Mahadev is seen wearing a loin-cloth and draped with a cotton-shawl. The secret of this dress has been given in a letter to Gandhiji written from Allahabad before going to jail. On 30th October 1921, Gandhiji had made a rule for himself that he would not eat till he had spun for half an hour daily. Mahadev commented on it:

"There is an essence in your pledge about the spinning which can be very effective. I welcome that pledge. Although only you know how many people you would be able to convert. Even my faithful mind definitely accepts that the grace-period for conversion in the matter of spinning is over. I don't want to take the pledge openly as I would not like to indicate that you encourage slavery. No cause should be given to the world by anyone that any plants, growing under your care, are growing as parasites. And yet there are many things that ought to be adopted. I started putting on a loin-cloth since I fell sick at Allahabad. When the Professor came I could not contain myself and told him that henceforth I would only wear this, I also told Jawaharlal. He laughed and said, 'People like you are the cause of the accusation that Bapu creates slaves.' I opposed him. I spoke in spite of having no strength to do so, I said, 'It is a fact that I put on this loin-cloth not because I have

anguished heart that Bapu has; he has immense feelings which I do not have, but I cannot remain untouched by the compassion he displays in a certain dress. Therefore, I also would make changes in my dress, I am not going to insist on it. If I feel that I need to put on a long *dhori* because of cold, I would do so; but I would not do so to prevent Kamalaben from being scandalised. Bapu's pledge is till October, I believe. But my pledge might be for ever, or I might just give it up. That is if I feel it to be a mere show or without any foundation."¹²

It seems Mahadev never put on a loin-cloth or draped a cotton-shawl around himself after his release from jail. His heated spirit of devotion moved by Gandhiji's pledge in those days, fortunately cooled on account of the two winters in jail! I have used the word 'fortunately' to indicate that Mahadev was himself only in his normal dress, not in dressing like a Mahatma. In that very letter he clarified his approach to the spinning-wheel. He said:

"The long and short of the matter is that I feel embarrassed to take a pledge like you for spinning because I feel that I would not be able to achieve much through that pledge. For a substantial production I must spin for ten hours daily — which is physically impossible today. Secondly, the moral effect that your pledge can have, will not apply to my pledge even to its thousandth degree. So why should I be a hypocrite to myself? And thirdly — please do not be shocked — I have not felt that the spinning-wheel is a sacramental rite."¹³

Mahadev added a brief but significant note when this letter was given to be printed in *Navajivan*:

"It must not be forgotten here that I have pledged to use, insist on, and propagate Swadeshi, for my whole life from the day I started to put on Khadi."¹⁴

Mahadev got quite a few comforts in the Agra Jail. He used to feel hurt because other prisoners did not get the same comforts. Regarding this Gandhiji wrote in an article:

"One who has a conscience and thinks, cannot easily get bodily happiness. He is oppressed by the misery of others and pines away. He cannot see the suffering round him. Such a pitiable condition is Mahadev Desai's for, he tries to judge the rightness of every action of his. He was happy as long as he was suffering physically, since he had been all too eager to go to jail in order that he might suffer. But now that he is happy in jail, . . . he suffers inwardly. . . . But now that they have Swaraj in jail, when they enjoy some freedom, these

freebooters in the army of Swaraj are fighting among themselves as robbers fight for a share of the booty.

"There is a lot for us to learn from Mahadev's this letter. . . It clearly shows that after we have secured power, we shall not be able to maintain the propriety and the restraint which we have been showing during the struggle.

"Let us recognise that there is a great difference between power and Swaraj. At present, most of us are fighting merely for power and authority. In this scramble, I see obstacles and impediments in our path. I see violence coming out of it. . . . Swaraj means self-rule, rule over oneself. In this struggle, he wins who bends and bears. It requires great self-restraint. In a scramble for power, everyone wants to be the first, so everyone fights against everyone else. Under autocratic rule, the foremost wins; under swaraj, on the contrary, the hindmost wins. Thus there is between the two as much difference as there is between an elephant and a horse — or rather between east and west."⁵

Gandhiji's article put an end to the discussion among the prisoners at the Agra Jail and their collective life became quite easy according to Mahadev's letter.

But only a month and a quarter had passed since Mahadev's imprisonment when he received a distressing piece of news. Rapid preparations for a nationwide non-co-operation movement were under way, in Bardoli the auspicious beginning of a national movement through a no-tax campaign were afoot; the whole country's attention was focused on Bardoli. Just then in Chauri Chaura of the Gorakhpur District in Uttar Pradesh, some people, mentally disturbed and misled, perpetrated such a massacre that the whole movement took a different turn. There, crowds of excited people chased the police posse, locked them up in the police station and set fire to it. Twenty-one policemen and one sub-inspector were burnt to death in this violence. Gandhiji was shocked and appalled at the news. He had the entire non-violent movement suspended, through a resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee which was in session to organise the strategy of the entire movement. It was not easy to get this resolution passed. Many leaders differed from Gandhiji in this matter. But actually he was the originator of the non-co-operation movement and none of the leaders had the moral courage to continue the movement by going against Gandhiji's leadership nor had anyone his experience of Satyagraha.

In the Agra Jail Mahadev first received the shocking reports of the Chauri Chaura massacre and then of the suspension of the movement through the Congress Committee's resolution.

The Chauri Chaura massacre took place on 4th February. The resolution of the Congress Working Committee at Bardoli was passed one week later. Gandhiji's decision to suspend the Satyagraha was supported in this session. Three days later Mahadev expressed his pain and agitation regarding the whole episode in a long letter written to Gandhiji from the Agra Jail.

"District Jail, Agra,
Feb. 15, 1922.

"My dearest Bapuji,

"I had thought that a decision not to trouble you with any more letters would be the only real expression of thankfulness for the two letters that you found time to send me from Bardoli. But I find that I cannot keep my peace. The last fortnight has been one of terrible shocks and wakeful nights for many of us, as I know it has been for you. And if I write this, I do not do so, to add to your multitudinous worries, but for light and guidance — though I am not quite sure that it will not be one shock more for you.

"We began this month quite hopefully. On what we thought was the auspicious first of February Joseph suggested the observance of a fast and the whole jail responded with a Common Prayer in the evening for the success of Freedom Battle to be begun that day in Bardoli. On the top of that came the first shock — your letter to the Viceroy. I frankly say it was a shock to me. Faced with the opinions of friends like Mr. Natarajan, I thought the letter was a betrayal of anxiety on your part to have an early settlement. The brilliant article 'Angad Vishti' in *Navajivan* and your letter from Bardoli cleared my doubts and dispelled my fears. I began settling down almost, and Joseph and I decided to have a fast again on the 11th — as you said you would have to take a definite step on that date.

"— When Lo! Comes a shock more terrible than the first — I mean the Chauri Chaura horror. It was a thunderbolt. Bindhyabasini Prasad of Gorakhpur felt as though he should sink into the ground for shame. I suggested a fast and we all fasted by way of expiation for the sin, well as we know what poor expiation it was. That was however, far from making anyone of us easy about the future. I knew what it would mean to you. Even as the prophet Habakkuk of old, I fancied you crying out, 'Oh Lord, how long shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save.' Why dost Thou show me iniquity and cause me to behold violence? For spoiling and violence are before me and these are that raise up contention.' I have prayed with what

humble power of prayer I have, that 'the kindly light may lead you amidst encircling gloom'. I pined for a letter from you every hour, though I knew how foolish I was to expect a letter from you who were almost torn asunder. And yet I hoped and prayed. The prayers were at last answered not with a letter from you, but with the text of the Resolution of the Working Committee which met at Bardoli. That came as the third and the most dreadful of all shocks. I have tried to understand you and this once I have signally failed. I cannot imagine how you could bring yourself to be party to such Resolutions as these. — You, after having written that article 'Angad Vishti' and after having rivetted popular attention on the pet issue of free speech, free press and free association. As early as March last year, at Bezwada we were agreed that so far as individual acts of disobedience were concerned, the Congress had no objection to them. Have we plodded all the year round to be now warned that even individual acts of disobedience would be against the mandate of the Congress? And what Resolutions are these? In the article characterised by commendable gracefulness, the *Times of India* expressed a readiness to subscribe to all of them. I fail to see how they are the distinctive property of the non-co-operator. The word 'non-co operation' does occur in the text of the Resolutions, but they would have been truer, without it. I cannot keep writing with the vehemence I am doing, for I feel that the Resolutions mean nothing less than a confession that in pitting our heads against a dead wall we have broken them and given a fresh offer to the people to break whatever fragments have been left of them.

Feb. 19

"You will see the above has been lying with me for 4 days. I stopped at the last sentence as I could muster no more anger or evidence to go along in the same reproachful strain. I fasted and prayed. In the while came your article in *Young India* reproduced in the *Bombay Chronicle*. It thrilled me through and through by its moral appeal, but left me cold when I thought of the practical results. Yesterday came *Young India* and I read it over again."¹⁶

To understand Mahadev's arguments it is necessary to read some excerpts from Gandhi's article, "Ghar-no-Gha":

"God has been abundantly kind to me. . . He has warned me the third time that there is not as yet in India, that truthful and non violent atmosphere which, alone can justify mass disobedience which can be at all described as civil, that is,

gentle, truthful, humble, knowing, wilful yet loving, never criminal and hateful."¹⁷

Then Gandhiji pointed out the three points of caution; first, the violence that took place in Ahmedabad, Kheda, Viramgam and the Punjab in 1919, secondly, riots in Bombay and thirdly civil-unrest in Madras. He continued :

" . . . God spoke clearly through Chauri Chaura. I understand that the constables who were so brutally hacked to death had given much provocation. They had even gone back upon the word given by the Inspector that they (his people) would not be molested, but when the procession had passed, those at the back were assaulted and abused by the constables. They cried out for help. The mob returned. The constables opened fire. The little ammunition they had was exhausted and they retired to the *Thana* for safety. The mob, my informant tells me, therefore, set fire to the *Thana*. The self-imprisoned constables had to come out for dear life and as they did so, they were hacked to pieces and the mangled remains were thrown into the raging flames.

"It is claimed that no non-co-operation volunteer had a hand in the brutality and that the mob had not only the immediate provocation but they also had general knowledge of the high-handed tyranny of the police in that district. No provocation can possibly justify the brutal murder of men who had been rendered defenceless and who had virtually thrown themselves on the mercy of the mob. And when India claims to be non-violent and hopes to mount the throne of liberty through non-violent means, mob violence even in answer to grave provocation augurs badly.

" . . . Non-violent attainment of self-government presupposes a non violent control over the violent elements in the country . . . 'Surely it is cowardly to withdraw the next day after pompous threats to the Government and promises to the people of Bardoli.' Thus Satan's invitation was to deny Truth and therefore, Religion, to deny God himself. I put my doubts and troubles before the Working Committee . . . The result is before the public in the shape of the Resolution of the Working Committee. The drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound, and . . . the country will have gained by my humiliation and confession of error.

"The only virtue I want to claim is Truth and Non-violence. I lay no claim to super-human powers. . . . I want

none. . . My services have many limitations, but God has upto now blessed them in spite of the imperfections.

"For, confession of error is like a broom that sweeps away dirt and leaves the surface cleaner than before I feel stronger for my confession. . . .

" . . . 'Bardoli is but a speck' on the map of India. Its effort cannot succeed unless there is perfect co-operation from the other parts . . . Just as the addition of a grain of arsenic to a pot of milk renders it unfit as food, so will the civility of Bardoli prove unacceptable by the addition of the deadly poison from Chauri Chaura. The latter represents India as much as Bardoli.

"Chauri Chaura is after all an aggravated symptom. . . . But the present movement is admittedly a dangerous experiment under adverse conditions.

"The tragedy of Chauri Chaura is really the index finger. . . . If we are not to evolve violence out of non-violence, it is quite clear that we must . . . not think of starting mass civil disobedience

"Let the opponent glory in our humiliation, or so called defeat. It is better to be charged with cowardice and weakness than to be guilty of denial of our oath and sin against God. It is a million times better to appear untrue before the world than to be untrue to ourselves. .

" . . . (I) have been the instrument, however involuntary, of Chauri Chaura. I must undergo personal cleansing. . . . My prayers must have deeper truth and humility about them than what they show . . . a fast undertaken for fuller expression, for attainment of the spirit's supremacy over the flesh, is a most powerful factor in one's evolution. After deep consideration, therefore, I am imposing on myself a five days' . . . fast, . . . I urge co-workers not to copy my example. . . . I am in the unhappy position of a surgeon proved skill-less to deal with an admittedly dangerous case. I must either abdicate or acquire greater skill. . . . All fasting and all penance must as far as possible be secret. But my fasting is both a penance and a punishment, and a punishment has to be public. It is penance for me and punishment for those whom I try to serve, for whom I love to live and would equally love to die The only way love punishes is by suffering. . . .

" . . . Chauri Chaura must stiffen the Government, must still further corrupt the police and the reprisals that will follow must further demoralize the people. The suspension of penance

will take us back to the position we occupied before the tragedy. . . .

"If we learn the full lesson of the tragedy, we can turn the curse into a blessing. . . ."¹⁸

In Mahadev's letter to Gandhiji about Chauri Chaura all the arguments were political and strategy-oriented. The following arguments from that letter prove that in spite of being an ardent devotee of Gandhiji and in spite of his constant effort of cultivating oneness with him, Mahadev retained his individuality.

"I shall summarise briefly the result of my thinking :

"1. The decision to suspend all aggressive and even defensive Civil Disobedience follows no doubt logically from the position that Civil Disobedience shall not be pursued except in an atmosphere of non-violence. But may I say that your meaning of 'an atmosphere of non-violence' is undergoing evolution. If you can isolate Malegaon, I do not know why you could not isolate Chauri Chaura. Does Chauri Chaura mean that a violent mood holds all the atmosphere ?

"2. Don't you by calling back all activities of a disobedient or defiant character everywhere in India withdraw the only unmistakable fact of the people's capacity for non-violence ? Absence of violence will naturally follow an atmosphere of general calm. But will that not be artificial ? You take up defiant activities, say, at the end of the year, provoke the authorities to provoke the people, and you again create possibilities for stray outbursts like those at Chauri Chaura. If anything can preclude those possibilities, it is the example of Gujarat or Bengal or Bihar practising civil disobedience, and not the whole country in a state of suspended animation.

"3. If you remember your Betiah speech of 1920 you said you could not offer a precept of non-violence to those who were incapable of violence. They must, you said, pass through the necessary middle stage of acquiring a capacity for violence. Of course Chauri Chaura had not even a semblance of justification. But supposing the people at any place dared to do violence instead of fleeing in the same circumstances as you had referred to in your Betiah speech, how could a movement of pacific disobedience going on in other parts of the country be affected ?

"4. I see that the new scheme proposes to 'gather together the husk, the chaff and the stubble and cast them into the burning lake'. I humbly think we have no prospect of success, owing to the internal defect of our instruments. At a certain stage in the volunteering movement, we lost all sight of quality

and bent our energies to swelling our numbers. The very fact of your wanting a crore of members will stand in the way of getting together, men pleaded to non-violence. The capacity to gather together wheat, to continue Bunyan's metaphor, is a rare quality.

"5 If you want to ensure that the movement should be undisturbed by an outburst of violence, of whatever character, the movement must be confined exclusively to men who accept non-violence as a creed, and not merely as a policy. I know such are few and far between, and the struggle would be one of an almost indefinite duration. But for one such as you who has made non-violence his mission, I can think of no other alternative."

Even after advancing these arguments about the principle of non-violence in the struggle, Mahadev went on to declare that he himself had been attracted not by Gandhiji — the capable commander and excellent policy maker in times of strife but by Gandhiji — the architect, who creates a votary of the soul. He concluded :

"I have done. I have placed my mind before you in its nakedness. I understand that there is a general feeling of disappointment over the Resolutions of the Working Committee. To a friend who suggested my writing to you for a revision of the Programme, I cryptically said, 'Well that is Gandhi. Accept him with all his excuses, or reject him. The country must make its choice.' I am afraid the country has to make its choice. I dare not predict. As for myself I made my choice five years ago when I cast in my lot with you at Godhra. That choice can be affected only when I decide to wash my hands off politics, and when I begin doubting your wonderful power of 'manufacturing souls'. I am in jail because I sincerely believed and still believe that I could not owe allegiance to an immoral Government and to its courts, and I shall continue to do so in spite of all changes in the programme, so long as that Government is substantially the same."¹⁹

How did others respond to the suspension of the movement — people who were interested in Gandhiji from the political rather than the spiritual point of view? Excerpts from *My Autobiography* written twelve years after the Chauri Chaura massacre give us an insight into Jawaharlal's reaction and that of those close to him at the time.

"... We in prison learnt, to our amazement and consternation, that Gandhiji had stopped the aggressive aspects of our struggle, that he had suspended civil disobedience.

We were angry when we learnt of this stoppage of our struggle

at a time when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts. But our disappointment and anger in prison could do little good to any one, and civil resistance stopped and non-co-operation wilted away. After many months of strain and anxiety the Government breathed again, and for the first time had the opportunity of taking the initiative. . . . The sudden suspension of our movement . . . was resented, I think, by almost all the prominent Congress leaders — other than Gandhiji of course. My father, who was in jail at the time, was much upset by it. . . . What troubled us even more were the reasons given for this suspension and the consequences that seemed to flow from them. Chauri Chaura may have been and was a deplorable occurrence and wholly opposed to the spirit of the non-violent movement, but were a remote village and a mob of excited peasants in an out-of-the-way place going to put an end, for some time at least, to our national struggle for freedom? If this was the inevitable consequence of a sporadic act of violence, then surely there was something lacking in the philosophy and technique of a non-violent struggle. . . . Must we train the three hundred and odd millions of India in the theory and practice of non-violent action before we could go forward? And, even so, how many of us could say that under extreme provocation from the police we would be able to remain perfectly peaceful? But even if we succeeded, what of the numerous *agents provocateurs*, stool pigeons, and the like who crept into our movement and indulged in violence themselves or induced others to do so? If this was the sole condition of its function, then the non-violent method of resistance would always fail."²⁰

Pondering further on this question Jawaharlal added:

"As a matter of fact even the suspension of civil resistance in February 1922 was certainly not due to Chauri Chaura alone. . . . That was only the last straw. Gandhiji has often acted almost by instinct. . . . At that time our movement, in spite of its apparent power and the widespread enthusiasm, was going to pieces. All organisation and discipline was disappearing; almost all our good men were in prison, and the masses had so far received little training to carry on by themselves. . . . These were probably the reasons and influences that worked in Gandhiji's mind, . . . and granting his premises and the desirability of carrying on with the technique of non-violence, his decision was right. He had to stop the rot and build anew."²¹

Deshbandhu Das also did not consider Gandhiji's decision of suspending the movement, proper. He criticised the decision very

sharply after being released from jail, though later on his attitude towards Gandhiji changed. Towards the end of his life, he regarded Gandhiji with deep affection and respect.

From the perusal of the articles of *Young India* and of Gandhiji's letter to Mahadev, it seems that Mahadev had largely reconciled himself regarding the decision about Chauri Chaura. Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev from Ajmer :

" . . I wish to see you all as you actually are and not as you would be, for I, too, wish to appear to you all as I am. I may very much wish to be better than what I am; but if I did not appear as I am, I cannot be what I wish to be. There was no need, therefore, for you to apologise.

"Take it from me that Chauri Chaura has saved us from a conflagration and has brought Swaraj miles nearer. That other Swaraj, we were trying to attain, was like a mirage. There is such a close connection between the means and the end that it is difficult to say which of the two is more important. Or we may say that the means is the body and the end is the soul. The end is invisible, the means is visible. Now we shall have the pleasure of demonstrating this great truth.

"Just as Sudhanva kept dancing with joy in the cauldron of boiling oil, so do I feel intense joy in the blazing fire around me. Now is the time when real non-violence will be revealed.

"You should always write whatever you wish to without any hesitation. Keep on purifying the atmosphere around you. I wish you become a powerful writer in Urdu. Your presence outside is no doubt useful. I, however, wish that you finish your term of imprisonment.

"You should not at all be worried about what is happening outside. Many people in America are unhappy. What can we do about them? Similarly, what can you do about what happens outside?"²²

Mahadev wrote to Gandhiji in his letter of 19th February 1922 .

"My very dear Bapuji,

"Your letter was a blessing! I was miserable on account of the Working Committee Resolution. If I had ever craved to be by your side, it was during these worrying days. The shocks that followed one after the other, made many others and myself very uneasy. My routine was disturbed and all my peace had vanished. Through your article on Chauri Chaura, some relief was possible, but still all my doubts have not been resolved. Please pray for me.

"We all are comfortable as usual. But our hearts go to those who are suffering agonies as they do not get the rightful

privileges as we do. I shuddered when I read about what you wrote regarding Rajagopalachari, the Ali Brothers and Jai Ramdas. Those people who pass through a stiff test are fortunate and they feel blessed. Can you suggest a method to suffer in place of someone else? Though I know that it is a thing to be done, not suggested."

In this letter Mahadev gave a report of the progress he had made in learning Urdu from Khwaja Saheb :

"I have started learning Urdu and made good progress in it. It is a rare privilege to learn Urdu from Khwaja. But this was actually self-praise stating that the master had got an equally worthy disciple as the disciple had a worthy master. I have sent a specimen of my fine Urdu letters. It is an excellent script, a good representative of the old Muslim majesty. I spend two hours daily on my Urdu lessons and hope to be able to read it quite fast within a month. Here we have a centre for learning languages. Khwaja daily teaches me some couplets from Urdu poems as well as important sentences from the Quran, over and above teaching me the language. I give him something from the Upanishads, and intend to take up Gita. I also read some Hindi with him."

Giving an analysis about his studies, Mahadev wrote :

"I had completed 'Sunderkāṇḍ' in Naini and have now completed Balakāṇḍ and Ayodhyakāṇḍ with Ramnareshji, and so I hope to finish the rest in about twenty more days. The rest is comparatively easy. It is very pleasant reading Ramayana every morning. The reader is submerged in the purity of Tulsidas when the time of the quiet dawn has been selected for its reading. Ramayana is more of a spiritual rendering rather than a history of Rama in poetry."

Completing the letter he said,

"You will be happy to know that I daily perform exercises and have increased my weight by nine pounds. I now weigh 128 lbs. while at Naini I was 119 lbs."

"When I am writing this, surrounded by Hindus and Muslims, Khwaja is majestically reciting the following, recently learnt Sanskrit verses

'Just as Agni (Fire), having entered the Universe,
Took various Forms, Reflecting Brahma,
So also the One Inner Self
Took various forms in All living Beings, Reflecting
Brahma.'

"Thus life is flowing like a poem. How nice it would have been if there was no intense misery elsewhere !

"With lots of love and respects,

Always yours,
Mahadev."²³

'Mahatma Gandhi' in Urdu has been written in beautiful lettering.

Mahadev pursued the theme of Chauri Chaura in another letter written in Agra on February 22nd. By this time, the extreme confusion of the earlier letter had subsided but Mahadev argued again that incidents could be considered in isolation, e.g. Malegaon. Explaining his disposition at the time of writing the first letter, Mahadev wrote :

"I have been worrying as to what you would have thought about my letter when I read your comments on Ranga Aiyar's letter. You had also written in your letter, 'You would have seen the resolutions and liked them.' I wrote to you as a duty, as to what I thought. I kept that letter for four days, fasted for one day because of the anger displayed therein; and then wrote the rest of the letter after getting some peace; I sent the whole letter so that you may see the filth of my mind and intellect. But there is a difference between Ranga and myself. I had raised some questions merely to understand the situation better. How can we grasp the situation outside while we are in jail? That was O.K. But we definitely can think academically about violence and non-violence."²⁴

At the end of the letter Mahadev expressed a feeling of relief and content to obey the rule for a Satyagrahi not to be concerned with the situation outside without understanding it himself when he is in jail :

"I will write a few words about the prisoners. I have understood to a great extent the propriety of the Working Committee Resolutions on my thinking about them. But what I believed was that the prisoners need not be concerned even if there are some mistakes in the Resolutions till our three demands are not compromised. Every one should understand that our three demands have not been given up on account of the Working Committee Resolutions and so should quieten down. The men in prison should not mind what the leaders do as they have to contend with the circumstances outside.

"Tukaram said wait and see whatever happens.'
One must be neutral and watch whatever happens.

"Please do not think that I always expect an answer to my letters. I am happy."²⁵

Now let us consider Mahadev's family.

Hundreds of Indian families were introduced to the jail for the first time through Gandhiji's non-co operation movement. Different people gauged these experiences in different ways according to their upbringing and social condition. But basically it brought forth the people's lesson in fearlessness.

We mentioned that Durga applied *kumkum* on Mahadev's forehead, garlanded him and bade him farewell in the Court. The various happenings towards the end of 1919 had filled Durga with new spirit. She had started helping Devdas to bring out hand-written copies of *The Independent* after Mahadev's imprisonment. She spent a certain amount of time regularly folding the newspapers, putting stamps on them and sending them to be posted. The inhuman treatment meted out to Mahadev in Naini Jail did not make Durga cringe, it only aroused her righteous indignation. She compared the difference in attitude of the jail officials to Motilalji and Jawaharlal on one hand and to Mahadev on the other. She assumed the role of a proud Rajput woman, sending her husband to the battlefield. The letter she wrote from Ahmedabad in reply to Narahari's somewhat consoling letter on hearing of Mahadev's imprisonment, was one worthy of a place in the Satyagraha literature.

"Should I write dear Brother or 'Baghabhai' ?

"I call you 'Bagha' because you write to me to become an editor, when you very well know the amount of knowledge I have and the training I have got. Nevertheless, I am proud of being the wife of a brave man whose pen became too much for the Government.

"You write, enjoy yourself. I am indeed enjoying myself because, though we have been physically separated, no one can separate our hearts. Since he has gone to jail, day and night I hear the sound of his saying, 'Pandit, Pandit', and I cheer up my heart with that sound.

"But when I went to see him I was hurt to see the treatment meted out to him in comparison to that given to Pandit Motilal and Jawaharlal. Motilalji is a lion. Everyone is afraid of him, but those people do not know that Mahadev also is a lion-cub. There is nothing creditable in caging a lion-cub and pestering it. Real test would be to face it outside.

"Devdasbhai has taken up his work. And they do not know that there are others if even he is arrested. They have lost their good sense. When doom is near, good sense leaves you.

"I am not at all unhappy, because I had handed him over to God when I left him in the Court. I have full faith that when God protects a man, his soul is never harmed no matter what

troubles he might have to go through I have full faith in the words of Dhira Bhakta's *bhajan* :

'Who can kill him, whom God protects ?

I do not see any one else but God !'

"I am waiting for Devdasbhai's arrest After that I will come to the Ashram Please tell Chhotubhai to tell my mother not to worry about me as God has given me courage.

Respects from Durga."²⁶

Durga had gone to Agra for an interview when Mahadev was shifted to Agra Jail and she most probably also went to Lucknow when Mahadev was taken there

The moral courage of Mahadev's father, Haribhai was not as firm as that of Durga. He broke down when he read the description of the vile conditions at Naini Jail He had resolved to attend the Congress Session held at Ahmedabad towards the end of December 1921, but he gave up his intention on hearing the news about Mahadev. He thought of visiting Mahadev in jail instead of going to Ahmedabad. To get an interview in jail, prior permission had to be obtained by writing to the jail authorities Some time elapsed in this procedure At last the interview was arranged for the 16th January It was decided that he would go for the interview with his nephew Chhotubhai. One day prior to the interview Mahadev wrote to Gandhiji, "My father is coming tomorrow to meet me He might shed tears I feel sorry for him I had written that I was very well There is no need for you to come. But he would come so far unnecessarily spending the money What is to be done ?"

When Durga went for an interview she informed Mahadev that his sister Shanta was engaged to a young man named Ambalal of Vesma village Mahadev immediately wrote to his father :

"I am in prison, what else can I wish ? I wish that she has a happy married life. I have no hopes about the boy studying But where to find educated boys ? It is good that Kalyanjikaka is concerned in the matter !"²⁷

In the Anavil community a girl's marriage is expensive Some dowry has also to be given Father's financial condition was not strong and Mahadev worried. He wrote to him :

"I have got a Fixed Deposit of Rs. 2,600/- in the Bank. Nothing can be withdrawn from that But if you write the amount you need, I would get it either from Mathuradas or Vaikunth or any other friend and send it to you. Do not undergo any hardship. I might have been useful if I was out of prison Now only you have to shoulder the burden It is a relief that Nana is there Chhotu could take a week's leave and come to you."

In this letter Mahadev also asked Haribhai to let Chhotubhai come for the interview as arranged. Durga would go with him to Dihen "I don't want you to get into unnecessary expense and trouble. So please don't come." At the same time Mahadev wrote a letter to Chhotubhai and said, "Do come and meet me. Persuade father not to come. Tell him that if necessary both of you could come again. The cold is also quite severe at present."²⁸

Haribhai and Chhotubhai got these letters before they left Dihen. Haribhai was not in good health and on top of it Mahadev asked him not to go. Chhotubhai also must have persuaded him not to go and so he gave up the idea of going to Agra.

Chhotubhai gave a description of the prison. He said :

"As soon as Mahadev saw me, he embraced me. He told his partners, 'Let us go to the cell, my brother has come to meet me from home.' All of us talked a lot. Then he gave me biscuits and tea. Mahadev himself was a tea 'fan'. He said, 'Here, you have to take not one, but two cups of tea, you could even take more — but not less.' He then took out sweets and told the others that, that was from home. Mahadev said, 'Now just see ! This is jail ! I get more to eat that I get at home — to the extent of getting indigestion. Tell father all this after returning home.'²⁹

Mahadev also talked about Shanta's marriage expenses. He sent a message with Chhotubhai that he would give the money he had and that father should not worry. Durga came from Allahabad to Agra and went to Dihen with Chhotubhai as previously arranged.

Mahadev wrote from Agra Jail to Narahari that he should positively go to Dihen to attend the marriage and that he should tell Haribhai not to suffer any financial stringency. Haribhai also wrote to Narahari, "I am very sorry that I have to undertake the marriage when Mahadev is in jail, but I have no other way out. I would feel satisfied if you came."³⁰ Both Narahari and Maniben went for the marriage from Sarbhan to Dihen in spite of there being no bus service on that route at that time. Pandit Narayan Moreshwar Khare from Sabarmati Ashram also attended the marriage. Narahari passed on Mahadev's message to Haribhai. But Haribhai only said, "I have arranged for all expenses. The only thing is that I am feeling hurt that I have to celebrate this occasion in Mahadev's absence. But what else can be done ?"³⁰

After going to Dihen Durga must have felt the pangs of separation more intensely. And although she had proudly bid farewell in the Allahabad Court, in some letters she expressed her suffering.

Mahadev's friends in Sabarmati felt very proud about his going to jail. Mahadev wrote to Narahari :

"I could not understand why all of you are so enamoured of my imprisonment. . . . I know that a man is greatly appreciated after his death, but I have only known about myself that he got the same appreciation by going to jail. I sometimes felt that it would be better to die now so that a time may not come, when we might be put to shame in unfortunate times by being considered unfit."³¹

Mahadev had undergone a lot of trauma on account of the Chauri Chaura massacre and the consequent Resolutions of Gandhiji and the Congress Working Committee. But then he thought that there was no point for the people in prison to worry unnecessarily about outside happenings and so decided to concentrate on his writing work. He had already completed the translation of Lord Morley's *On Compromise*, but to correct it for final publication, he asked Narahari to send him the manuscript. But Narahari could not send it because he could not find the key to his trunk. Mahadev translated Sharadchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Biraj Bahu*, and three other stories during his jail term. These translations in Gujarati are considered to be of a very high quality.

Mahadev and some other partners were transferred to Lucknow Jail after spending seven months in Agra. Jawaharlal was also in Lucknow. Jawaharlal had noted in his diary on 11th July 1922, "Today Mahadev, Ramnaresh Tripathi, and some others were brought here from Agra jail."

Although Mahadev and Jawahar were in the same jail, both were lodged in separate barracks. Jawaharlal made a special note that both of them were brought to the same barrack on 15th October. On 21st December, all friends celebrated Mahadev's birthday according to the Hindu calendar. Mahadev and Jawahar, both lovers of books had read many books available in jail and had held many discussions about them during their imprisonment. But unfortunately Mahadev did not write his diary in the absence of Gandhiji and Jawahar made only very brief notes.

On 1st September, Urmiladevi came specially from Calcutta to meet Mahadev. Urmiladevi was Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's sister. She had been charmed by Mahadev and considered him her son since Gandhiji once stayed with her in Calcutta. This mother and son relationship lasted throughout Mahadev's whole life and even after his death it was as cordial with Durga and Narayan till Urmiladevi's last days. Urmiladevi had written an article as a tribute after Mahadev's death.

On the 17th October Jawaharlal had noted that they were only seven in their barrack — Purushottamdas Tandon, Mahadev, Devdas, Venkatraman and two others. He had also considered worth noting the fact that Mahadev used to insist on sharing *suran* with him which was brought from Gujarat.

George Joseph was the editor of *The Independent* before Mahadev. Both were arrested for the same offence and both were sentenced for one year each. He was an author of repute as well as a powerful speaker. Just recently, his daughter has written a brief life-sketch of his. In that life-sketch she refers to a letter written by her father to her mother during this term of imprisonment. He had stated that it was his good fortune to have got the opportunity to stay in close contact with a person of Mahadev's calibre.

Mahadev had no difficulty in Agra jail. His weight had also increased during his jail term by about fifteen to sixteen pounds. But just then they got the news that Gandhiji was arrested because of the contents of some of his articles. Even before the trial Gandhiji wrote of the attitude of a Satyagrahi to life in prison.

"Sabarmati Jail,
Day of Silence,
(17-3-22)

"Dear Mahadev,

"Maybe this will be my last letter to you for a long time. My real service begins here. I shall exert myself to the utmost to observe the jail rules with my whole being, to shake off likes and dislikes, and if I become purer every day in jail, that will have its effect outside also. Today there is no limit to my peace of mind, but when I am sentenced and visits from people stop, I shall have greater peace of mind.

"It may be asked, if we can render greater service in this manner, why not go and live in a jungle. The answer is simple. To go and live in a jungle suggests *moha*, for it implies desire on our part. To a Kshatriya whatever comes unsought is *dharma*. The peace of jail life which one gets without seeking may do one good. How wonderful is God! I purified myself thoroughly in Bardoli, did not allow any impurity to enter into me in Delhi, but on the contrary purified myself still farther by putting before the people the same thing in a language which would appeal to them, for I showed thereby my tenderness together with my firmness. Even afterwards, through *Young India* and *Navajivan*, I carried on self-purification. I wrote an article on 'Ahimsa' and another entitled, 'Death Dance'. Thus when the process of self-purification had reached the highest

point, I offered myself for arrest, singing the song of *Vaishnavajana*. If this does not constitute good, what else can ?

Blessing from Bapu."³²

The trial of Gandhiji that took place in the Ahmedabad Circuit House has come to be known as "The Great Trial". The details of the trial are thrilling for the students of the history of Indian independence. He was sentenced for six years in that trial.

Soon after this news there was a rumour in the jail that Gandhiji had been flogged. Naturally Mahadev was distressed by this rumour. The Government denied it, but still Mahadev was not at peace. He sought the correct information from two of his close friends — Vaikunth Mehta and Sayyed Abdulla Brelvi. Lallubhai Shamaldas Mehta, Vaikunthbhai's father, was a member of the Council of State of the Government. Mahadev was like a family member to Sir Lallubhai. But Mahadev did not want to embarrass him by writing to him directly and so he wrote to his two young friends about the rumour. Sir Lallubhai himself wrote to Mahadev and relieved his anxiety.

When on 23rd January 1923, Mahadev was released from his first imprisonment, he had in a manner of speaking graduated in the science of Satyagraha. He had faced hardships joyfully, considered himself a partner in the hardships faced by others, he made use of every moment, he had improved his health, he had strengthened his bond with his family, he had continued study and talks through active participation, he had thought deeply about the science of Satyagraha, its strategy of battle and its philosophy and above all he had covered new places of pilgrimage in his spiritual penance. During all this time he was separated from Gandhiji only in physical terms. Their closeness did not suffer and Mahadev, eagerly awaited news from his mentor. His condition was like a partridge waiting for the moon without Gandhiji's letters. So he wrote in a letter, "I am withering away by craving for your letter."

FOOTNOTES -

1. *M. D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 161 to 163 (Guj.)
2. Narahari Pankh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, pp. 63-64
3. *Ibid.*, p. 94
4. Vajubhai Shah, *Mahadevbhai*, pp. 46 to 51
5. *The New Testament*, Story of Maththew, Chap. 6, Verse 28
6. Original letter from Gandhi Sangrahalaya, Sabarmati
7. *M.D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 109 to 116 (Guj.)
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 117 to 119 (Guj.)
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23 (Guj.)
10. *CWMG*, Vol. 22, pp. 193-94

11. *M.D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 129 to 131 (Guj.)
12. *Ibid.* pp. 31-32 (Guj.)
13. *Ibid.* pp. 32-33 (Guj.)
14. *Ibid.* p. 33 (Guj.)
15. *CWMG*, Vol. 22, pp. 236-37
16. *M.D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 132 to 134 (Guj.)
17. *CWMG*, Vol. 22, p. 415
18. *Ibid.* pp. 416 to 419 (selected)
19. *M.D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 134 to 136 (Guj.)
20. Jawaharlal Nehru, *My Autobiography*, pp. 81-82
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86
22. *CWMG*, Vol. 23, pp. 69-70
23. *M.D.'s Diary*, Vol. 16, pp. 138 to 140 (Guj.)
24. *Ibid.* p. 142 (Guj.)
25. *Ibid.* p. 144 (Guj.)
26. Narayan Desai, *Mane Kem Visare Re ?* pp. 148-49
27. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa Mahadevbhat Desai Smritichitra*, p. 93
28. *Ibid.* p. 94
29. *Ibid.* p. 95
30. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadevbhat-nun-Poorvacharit*, p. 95
31. Chandulal Dalal, *Swa Mahadev Desai Smritichitra*, p. 96
32. *CWMG*, Vol. 23, p. 100

CHAPTER XXI

NAVAJIVAN

"My regards to all. At last I have come out. I do not know whether I have come nearer to Swarajya and God or not since I entered the prison gates, but I have certainly become purified and more humble than I was at that time. Moreover, I have developed a greater capacity to bear pain. It was indeed a delight to be in prison. But it is no less delightful to come out of it and enter this grand prison with a firm resolve to break its chains of slavery."¹

This was the brief statement Satyagrahi Mahadev gave in the issue of *Navajivan* of 28th January 1923, two days after he was released from Lucknow Jail. This statement clarified his attitude. His goal in life was Swarājya and attaining proximity to God. The precious pains of prison life yielded the fruits of greater humility, greater purity, the capacity to bear pain silently and a firm resolve to sacrifice oneself in the freedom struggle.

By this time Gandhiji had been imprisoned. Swami Anand, who managed *Navajivan*, was also in prison. Kakasaheb Kalelkar took up the responsibility. "Good News for Navajivan" was the title for the article.

"Shri Mahadev Desai must have been released from jail last Tuesday. He will arrive here by the end of this month. I am aware that readers of *Navajivan* are craving to read Mahadevbhai's cultured and brilliant articles. Gandhiji, Mahadevbhai and Swami Anand have been considered the breath of *Navajivan*. Though I would try to serve *Navajivan* along with my work of Rashtriya Vidyapeeth, people have to look towards Mahadev. It is he and he alone, who carries and spreads the divine message of Mahatmaji. His service to Gujarati language till today has got the polish of a prison sentence. Readers of *Navajivan* get ready to receive his brilliant thoughts."²

Kakasaheb had hoped that he could pay more attention to the activities of the Rashtriya Shala after handing over *Navajivan* to Mahadev, but the Government was incensed by the articles he wrote during his editorship and asked for a bond of 'good behaviour' from him. It was sheer audacity to have asked for such a bond from the upright Principal of the Satyagraha Ashram Rashtriya Shala. A case was registered against Kakasaheb as the Editor and Ramdas Gandhi as the Publisher of *Navajivan* relating to two articles and the bond was demanded. Both men refused to give such a bond. Kakasaheb was sentenced to one year's simple imprisonment and Ramdas was left off with a warning. Thus Mahadev had to take up the running of *Navajivan* the moment he arrived in Gujarat from Lucknow.

For Mahadev working in *Navajivan* was nothing new. As Kakasaheb had described, Gandhiji, Swami Anand and Mahadev were considered the breath of the periodical. Mahadev was deeply involved with it since its first issue was brought out in 1919. Thus he was fully conscious of the type of responsibility he was inheriting.

Navajivan came in the wake of *Young India*. Gandhiji said that he had taken over *Young India* because of his enthusiasm to explain the secret of Satyagraha. *Navajivan's* objective was the same. He wrote :

"My principal field of work lay in Gujarat. Sjt. Indulal Yagnik was at that time associated with the group of Messrs. Sobhani and Banker. He was conducting the Gujarati monthly *Navajivan* which had the financial backing of three friends. They placed the monthly at my disposal, and further Sjt. Indulal offered to work on it. This monthly was converted into a weekly."

Gandhiji had managed *Indian Opinion* in two languages in South Africa. But he had not taken the responsibility of being its Editor. Gandhiji wrote at that time :

"This is the first occasion when I appear in public as an editor. I have welcomed it, but I am nervous. I am fully aware of the responsibility I am undertaking. This is not South Africa. There I used to manage things somewhat. But here? There is no lack of newspapers. Of writers there are many. My command of the language is severely limited. Having stayed out of India for twenty years, my information about Indian problems is bound to be inadequate. This is no more language of modesty, but a vivid picture of my condition.

"Despite these limitations of mine, I clearly see that I have something to give to India which no one else has in equal measure. With much striving I have formulated some principles

of life, and have put them into practice. The happiness I have found that way, I think, I have not seen in another way of life. Many a friend has testified to this. It is my sincere aspiration to present these principles before India and share my happiness with her. A newspaper is one means to that end."⁴

As Gandhiji was in jail, it became Mahadev's job to put Gandhiji's noble thoughts before people. Certainly Mahadev was worthy enough to shoulder this responsibility after having spent four years in Gandhiji's presence day and night and having constantly pondered over his teaching for one year in jail. Before Mahadev went to Allahabad, his weekly letter appeared, almost in every issue of *Navajivan*. He was named as the editor as late as 20th October 1923, but his article had appeared even before that. Initially, Mahadev's name appeared as the Publisher of *Young India*. The task of bringing out these periodicals and spreading them amongst the people devolved jointly upon all those connected with it.

Just as the duties of the publisher and publication were common, the responsibility of maintaining the values established by it was also commonly held. Gandhiji considered that everyone concerned, including the readers had a duty towards *Navajivan*. "We must constantly try to see that *Navajivan* does not become a source of unfit or low ideas, false news or discourteous language. And we ask our readers to guard us so that we do not commit a mistake. We believe that our relations with our readers are not businesslike but that they are close and based on morality."⁵

Mahadev continued the direction Gandhiji had already given to the writers of *Navajivan* :

"The articles must be as brief as possible. Only facts should be given; arguments or adjectives are not required at all. There should be no exaggeration anywhere in the articles. Never write from hearsay."⁶

The Gandhian policy on advertising was equally strict. He believed that advertisements sully the righteous mission of the papers and destroy their independence.

Swami Anand, a bosom friend of both, who took over as assistant editor of *Navajivan* after Mahadev and Gandhiji's arrest, was fully conscious of the promise given to the readers.

"What will happen to *Navajivan* ? Will *Navajivan* continue or close down ? Will the Government allow it to be published ? When the Government has imprisoned Gandhiji, how can it allow *Navajivan* to go on ?

"Such questions were being asked by the people. Explanations were exchanged among themselves. The editors must also give an explanation according to our capacity.

Navajivan will go on. It is easy for the Government to stop its printing with metal-moulds. We have to see whether it is easy to snatch away *Navajivan* from the masses. It involves danger!"

Announcing his intention to continue *Navajivan*, Swami Anand expressed his firm resolve to adhere to Gandhiji's tradition of truth, non-violence and fearlessness, as well as to continue his work and to propogate resistance towards the unjust system. He said

"It is a time for distress for *Navajivan* because of the stoppage of Gandhiji's words which used to appear frequently, but we will try to hang on steadfastly to the tradition of truth, non-violence and fearlessness bequeathed by him, and to serve the people even during this distressful period. We would consider it our sacred duty to spread displeasure about the unjust Government and cultivate virtues in the people. This may help them to establish a just Government by defeating this wicked one. The effort to fight an oppressive Government against which Gandhiji fought day and night and put in endless efforts to wipe it off if it could not be changed, will be kept alive by us."

The assistant editor concluded his article by announcing his pledge to serve the people by publishing articles consistent with Gandhiji's line of thought in spite of his own inadequacies and the limitations of the time and stated :

"... We have not shown discourtesy by occupying the editor's chair. We also know how rare is the capacity of examining and criticising the faults of the opponents without rancour as Gandhiji did. ... By Gandhiji's not being in our midst, we are not fortunate enough to present to the people, the life-giving thoughts arising out of his unusual personality.

"... We should go on repeating the words Gandhiji had left to mould the people after three years of untiring efforts; try to put them into practice and if all of us understand our duty, Swaraj would be easily attained."

It is worth bearing in mind that there was a lot of difference in running *Navajivan* when Gandhiji was free and when Mahadev took over the complete responsibility.

The period from 1919 to 1922 was a period of the non-co-operation movement. It was a time of a favourable tide. The period after Gandhiji's arrest was a lean time. The Government delayed his arrest until 1922 because they could not estimate to what extent conditions would deteriorate if he was arrested. So till then they decided to arrest other leaders and separate Gandhiji from his colleagues and clip his wings. After Gandhiji suspended the

movement there was some dissatisfaction among the leadership of the country. Actually, almost all leaders were in jail and the volunteers were confused with the shock of suspension. The Government saw its chance and shot at the mark. Gandhiji was arrested and the movement was on a low key for a while.

Whenever tempo of the movement diminished, the differences amongst the workers surfaced! Those leaders who were drawn towards non-co-operation because of Gandhiji's charisma, turned instead towards Legislative Assemblies and the Central Executive Council. Many proposed that the Congress should rethink its programme of non-co-operation and think of a plan to enter the assemblies. The younger persons participating in the non-co-operation movement were against this idea. They believed in staunchly adhering to the entire programme of the non-co-operation. Thus there were two factions in the Congress Leadership. Swarajists, who believed in going for the assembly and the Non-co-operators who believed in the rejection of assemblies and legal practice. To the common people these factions were known as Pro-changers and No-changers. Generally speaking the older leaders were Pro-changers and the younger leaders were No-changers.

Mahadev took up the reins of *Navajivan* under these circumstances. He himself was a No-changer. He wished that constructive work would be taken up along with all the activities of non-co-operation. The principals among the No-changers of that period were Vallabhbhai, Rajaji and Mahadev. From the Congress leaders, Jairamdas Daulatram from Sind, Jinnalal Bajaj from Wardha, and Acharya Kripalani, originally from Sind but later on having worked in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh also belonged to this group. These people had the support of the young Congressmen from various places and they were engaged in ideological argument with the older leaders. Among the No-changers Rajaji, Mahadev and Jinnalal were the three leaders who emphasised on the programme of Khadi, removal of untouchability and communal unity.

The national non-co-operation movement had awakened feelings of latent hostility towards the British. That awakening was responsible for the strength of the movement. The country had entered the state of passion and pride from that of ignorance and darkness. But Gandhiji had wanted to burnish the passion and pride with purity. That was the work of a real Satyagrahi. But that work had not been adequately accomplished when the Government snatched away the charioteer who directed the whole movement, arrested him and sentenced him for six years.

The No-changers had to preserve the purity of the movement. They had to maintain its high tempo, and had to show enough

humility to prevent the Congress being divided Mahadev, as the Editor of *Navajivan*, had to uphold all these various values. After he became editor of *The Independent*, he had become famous overnight like Byron by bringing out a hand written copy of the paper. Now he had to develop a personality worthy of that fame. He had to do it unaided because Swami Anand and Kakasaheb, the two who could help him the most in these circumstances, were behind bars.

In that very statement, written in Patna after his release, Mahadev had referred to some of the national questions of the time "It is a sad thing that our group has broken up in our camp What is it that hurts the most? It is the attitude of indifference amongst the people. People have forgotten Khadi. I have glanced in every corner of Lucknow and Allahabad. On everybody I saw that awful poison — 'foreign cloth'." Then he commented on the movement. "The World outside is amazed, watching our wonderful fight with an unbearable system of administration At such a time we seem to be tired of the fight."⁸

Mahadev met Pandit Motilal after being released in Lucknow. Panditji's ideas at that time were clearly in favour of the Pro-changers Nevertheless, Mahadev said that the message sent to him by Rajaji from Yeravda Jail was correct, and he wrote :

"I was fortunate enough to sit at the feet of Pandit Motilal for these two days His daughter is seriously ill and so he is very worried, but he is maintaining calm, and was good enough to talk to me on a couple of occasions when he opened his heart. But I am sorry to say that my thoughts have not changed because of his advice After considering all his arguments, the mind bears witness that there is no sin in not entering the Assembly, but it would be definitely sinful to let the constructive work programme weaken.

"When I was in jail and when we were given newspapers in jail, I read a message sent by Rajagopalachari from Yeravda in the newspaper *Leader* At that time I had felt and today also I have the same feeling that he is a true disciple of his master. It was said about a disciple that he had grasped the secret of his Guru's speech to such an extent that his ears could hear his Guru's silence as well This applied to Rajagopalachari I have been out only for the last three days. Even during that time I saw that many are displeased with him. But that did not matter, because I know how large his heart is. I am sure that the fountain of love that emerges from his heart would quench the anger against him I feel that our leaders had left us because we destroyed their enthusiasm by presenting them with ideas of

dispiritedness, indifference and utter darkness. The moment we shook those things off, they would accept us once again."⁹

Mahadev was pricked by one fact before beginning the series of articles for *Navajivan*. Upto then he had written descriptions of Gandhiji's travels; after his own release, he would have to describe his own tours :

"Many times I have felt after being released from jail, 'What could it matter if I sit down with a vow of silence? What other message except that of Gandhiji, would I have to give? And his messages have been preserved eternally in his speech.'"¹⁰

And yet he started writing in *Navajivan* as Gandhiji's soldier. Since the arguments between No-changers and Pro changers were going on, he wrote about Motilal pleasantly talking and joking with him in spite of his daughter's serious illness. Mahadev had given two arguments against Council entry to Motilal. Firstly, one had to say, 'I am loyal to the Emperor' on entering the Assembly and secondly, one has to accept the paramount power of the British Government on entering the Council. Panditji laughed out both the arguments, consigning the former to emotionalism, and the second to too much logic. Mahadev wrote, "It was natural for him to laugh it out! I was like a child to him."¹¹

When the absence of the master was constantly pricking his mind and when the colleagues with whom he could share thoughts and discuss daily, were also imprisoned, the responsibility of supporting through *Navajivan*, the ever weakening movement fell upon Mahadev. This he did with infinite patience, uncommon courage and without letting it affect his pleasant nature. During this time, Rajagopalachari was the Editor of *Young India*. Mahadev derived a lot of support from his articles. Almost at the same time Jamnalal and Vallabhbhai were occupied with explicit breach of law in the 'Flag Satyagraha' at Nagpur. The Government had itself offered this chance for Satyagraha. On April 13th 1923, the Government of Central Provinces and Berar stopped a people's procession going to the Nagpur Civil Lines with the National Flag, and declared Section 144, under which collecting of four or more persons was prohibited. The volunteers declared their right to go anywhere with the National Flag and went ahead. They were arrested and sentenced. This activity rapidly became a movement. The Congress Working Committee blessed the movement, along with the local Congress Committee. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj as the leader of the procession was fined Rs 3,000/- His car was confiscated in lieu of the fine. But no one was willing to buy it in Nagpur. And therefore it had to be taken to Kathiawad. Congress gave the leadership of the

'Flag Satyagraha' to Vallabhbhai. Groups of volunteers came from all over the country, and the Satyagraha continued. Volunteers went to prison. They smilingly suffered a lot of hardships in the prison. Vallabhbhai kept Mahadev regularly informed about the activities of the movement. During the Kheda Satyagraha, Mahadev and Vallabhbhai had become friends. That friendship developed into one of firm trust by which they could discuss the minutest details of the strategy for the movement and even by sitting at two distant places in the country — one at Gujarat and the other at Nagpur — they could hand over various tasks to each other. At the time of Nagpur Satyagraha, Vallabhbhai did have the support of his elder brother, Vitthalbhai, but he could discuss every move on the battlefield with Mahadev. Here is a sample :

"August 1923

Dear Brother Mahadev,

. . . battle is very fine. If people are united, they can put the Government on tenterhooks in a week's time. But at present the pipe is playing different tunes. So how can the voice of Nagpur reach the people? All English newspapers are either antagonistic or indifferent. Leaders are harping on their thoughts and there is no objective thinking.

In this province Government is very strict. All the local workers have been arrested. The local Provincial Congress Committee has shown no interest from the very beginning. Under such circumstances we are fighting.

Dasbabu has gone to the opposite camp. The Congress Working Committee meeting was to be held on 28th — the venue was shifted from Bombay to Vizagapattam. Date was also changed. Then AICC meeting was also fixed, and it was decided to call all of them there. In spite of these various difficulties, we have to work hard to attract the attention of everybody towards Nagpur.

Government has come to know that the struggle has again gained momentum. Lots of people come as per arrangement. On the 3rd there is a meeting of the Executive Council of Central Provinces Government, and on the 6th State Legislative Assembly session begins. This question will surely be discussed in Legislative Assembly, but nothing will emerge out of it. Only Government will get an opportunity to abuse us. Yet we might get the opportunity of knowing the intention of the Government. Those who are hoping that the fight will be over before the Assembly session is held are disappointed. All this is not to be printed.

We have to prepare a batch for next eighteenth. I will write to you afterwards about the number of Satyagrahis to be sent from Gujarat. Chinai (Chimanlal) from Surat is ready. He can be the leader. There are 20-25 soldiers from Surat. We have to try to get others.

We have to appeal for the funds in one or two issues of *Navajivan*. Please get a very fine appeal printed, continue recruiting volunteers. It seems that I won't be arrested at present. Previously they had no solid reasons, but as Satyagraha has got momentum, so the government might think over it. But I believe that no action will be taken till the Assembly session is over.

Don't confine Devdas to Press only. Let him move outside also. Gujarat has not yet known him. He does not get a chance.

Saw Chandubhai and Pandya in jail. Both have been kept as ordinary prisoners. They have been given work in a printing press. They are cheerful, officers love them, and they are in good health.

You and Devdas visit home now and then, and see that the children do not feel lonely. I do not understand why Maniben cried. Now there should not be any crying. She is very brave. She advised the people of Madhya Prant to go to jail. Then how can she cry? Tell respected Ba to be ready for going to jail. If you can issue an appeal to Gujarat women in Ba's name to come to Nagpur on 18th instant, it will be excellent.

"Seventeenth is the expiry date of the order. If the order is extended, then from eighteenth, women should begin their sacrifice. It is a fine way of awakening the people. We must believe that Government will extend the term of the order. If it is not extended then with what face can it keep the prisoners in jail?

Regards to everyone in the Ashram. *Pranaams* to Ba.

Vallabhbhai's

Vande Mataram "12

In Gujarat Mahadev brought out appeals in pamphlets as well as through *Navajivan* inviting volunteers for the Satyagraha and donations for the movement. As a result of a definite strategy, the columns of *Navajivan* started to make an impact.

Officially, Mahadev became *Navajivan*'s Editor from 22nd October, 1923. But months before that his pen had commenced influencing the national movement through its columns. This work could be compared to a swimmer who had just learnt to swim, diving into the vast ocean, or to an efficient soldier who was suddenly faced with the responsibility of the commander. It was

Mahadev's first responsibility to express his opinions on the current affairs every week. The second responsibility was to give a right direction to the movement with which the weekly was connected. His final responsibility was to give his opinions regarding the guidance Gandhiji would have given for the daily changing scenario. Mahadev could fulfil all three duties because he had moved about in every corner of the country during the past few years and had come into close contact with almost all the national leaders. He could fulfil the second as he had minutely observed the strategies of the movement through his constant proximity to the father of the movement and the support of expert commanders like Vallabhbhai and Rajagopalachari. He could carry out the third, because by that time he had become one with Gandhiji. No doubt, his own attitude towards the work was one of humility and that saved him from conflict with many people on account of difference of opinion.

Mahadev was a witness and an admirer of the progress of *Navajivan* once it came into Gandhiji's hands. Originally it was a monthly named *Navajivan-ane-Satya* with 600 subscribers. When it changed hands and was conducted by Gandhiji, they had to print 5,000 copies of the very first issue, and within a couple of months 15,000 copies were printed. The 'Natwar Printing Press' where *Navajivan* was being printed, became inadequate for the purpose and so *Navajivan* got its own printing press. Mahadev had repeatedly read the clarification Gandhiji gave regarding the future in the leading article of the very first issue :

"For me, Satyagraha is not a mere copy-book maxim - it is my very life. To me nothing but truth has any interest. I am convinced that the country can never benefit by untruth. In any case, I am firmly of the view that even if untruth should seem profitable for the time-being, we must not abandon truth. . . In the course of my seeking I have come by innumerable gems, which I want to place before India. *Navajivan* is intended to be a sort of advertisement for them."¹³

At that time Gandhiji pointed out the unique characteristic of Satyagraha, and said :

"Even when fighting in circumstances none too favourable to them, mutual respect and amicable relations between two parties are maintained. *Navajivan* will show with facts and arguments that, in India too, though fighting with regard to matters on which we differ from the officials, we may still co-operate with them on others. . .

"But Satyagraha is not limited to the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. For social reform too, it is a priceless weapon, one without a parallel. The condition of women, our

many evil customs, the difficulties which arise between Hindus and Muslims, the hardships of the 'Untouchables' — a great many of such problems can be solved this way."¹⁴

Within these four years Mahadev had adopted a Satyagrahi's method of work keeping the mind open to try to understand the opposition. In spite of maintaining what he understood as truth he never lost humility and charm in saying what he had to say firmly and clearly.

Mahadev had specially come to Ahmedabad from Bombay to prepare the first issue of *Navajivan*. Gandhiji was keen to get the articles from scholars of Gujarat and get their blessings. To contact the scholars and get them to write the articles, Mahadev's beautiful handwriting, his charming personality and pleasant language must have surely been useful. Mahadev also was successful in getting the Ashram women to take some trouble of writing articles for the first issue.

Anandshankar Dhruva wrote an article "Satyamishtha" (Devotion to Truth). He began the article with the question, "What else but truth can be placed in the bowl when 'Gandhi, the devotee of truth asks for alms?' " Then quoting the story of Agnyadhyeya of *Shatapath Brahmana* he wrote :

"It is a devilish inclination to want to utilise, the great raging fire for remoulding the world, for burning or lighting our own petty selfish stuff. It would be a divine attitude to imbibe that fire within our souls to give up our selfishness as an offering to it and to perform some good deeds because of it. Those who turn to the divine attitude realise the soul. You may name that realisation as ancient life or modern life, I would only call it life. Proper service towards that life is devotion to truth."¹⁵

Mahadev's constant effort was to imbibe truth and give up his selfishness as an offering to it. And so in his own way he became worthy of Anandshankarbhai's blissful inclination and could make *Navajivan* a worthy paper.

Mahadev could easily abide by Gandhiji's points of insistence regarding the translations frequently appearing in *Young India* and *Navajivan*. Gandhiji said :

"To translate from one language to another is more difficult than expected. The proper meaning could be preserved only if there was equal control over both the languages and comprehension of the subject."¹⁶

Translating Gandhiji's writings presented no problems because Mahadev had firm hold over both his thoughts and language. Rajagopalachari edited *Young India* in Gandhiji's absence. His

language differed from Gandhiji's in his mode of writing. But Mahadev understood his thoughts. For some time in between Shweb Qureshi edited *Young India*. Mahadev was not very familiar with his mode of writing and his language. But basically Mahadev's skill in translation was so good that he could find his way out of any problems.

On 5th February 1924 Gandhiji himself undertook *Navajivan*'s editorial responsibility after being released from the prison. Mahadev bade farewell to the readers in these 'pleasant circumstances'. But even after this according to Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan*'s historian, "Mahadev continued to write for *Navajivan* as a perceptive commentator of Gandhiji's activities, as well as the critic and narrator of his principles. He served the readers of *Navajivan*, till the end, by his lucid, charming and effective style of writing."¹⁷ But Mahadev indeed felt relieved from the responsibility of its editorship after Gandhiji took over.

During the days when *Navajivan* was Mahadev's main activity, the way he gave a leadership to the non-co-operation movement and the country, can never be undervalued. Here are some instances.

Normally, when Mahadev travelled with Gandhiji he introduced the people he met, to the readers through the periodicals. The readers got an excellent education. The Gujarati language benefited by acquiring some fine character-sketches through these introductions. A number of pages could be filled even if we gave only the names of all the known and unknown workers he introduced to the readers of *Navajivan*. But interested readers might perceive that the character sketches, given briefly, contain high literary merit along with a lot of information about Dr. P. C. Ray, Rajaji, Deenbandhu Andrews, 'Baro Dada' Ravindranath Tagore's elder brother, one unknown untouchable worker, Shankarlal Banker, Dr. Tribhuvandas Dharamdas of Miyagam, Manchershah Avari, Kalyanjibhai, Dayalji, Mohanlal Pandya, Ravishankar (Maharaj), Jamnalal, Kakasaheb and Vinoba.

But Mahadev's chief mission during this period was to keep the fire of the non-co-operation movement burning. His pen became more powerful in writing about the non-co-operation movement. On one hand, his ability as a pleader gained strength in countering the arguments of Pro-changers like Motilal and Chittaranjan Das. On the other, he did not hesitate in giving a fitting reply to Poet Ravindranath Tagore when Tagore was making unfavourable statements about the non-co-operation movement or Jallianwala Bagh. Vitthalbhai Patel had also not been spared from Mahadev's attack. Mahadev nourished the non-co-operation movement by drawing comparisons with people's movements abroad. At one time

he compared the attitude of an Irish Poet to the attitude of Ravindranath Tagore. He inspired the Flag Satyagrahis at Nagpur by quoting the song for the Flag of Germany. An excerpt from an article "Let's See Who Tires First" is below :

" 'Nagpur Satyagraha is a hypocrisy. It is a movement started by crafty shameless rogues to harass the Europeans and overthrow the Government.' *The Times* (of India ?) after showering the above abuse, recommended to the Government, that 'the delusion, of these people, that they can fight the Government without being shot, should be broken.' Keeping the movement peaceful we had only to stand against the obstinacy of the Government. Now shooting has been added to it. The suggestion for shooting came from a benefactor. The Government must be waiting to adopt that suggestion. Meanwhile, it has also started planning other stratagems. *The Bombay Chronicle* has printed a pamphlet being circulated by the Deputy Commissioner of Seoni, which describes the new measures very nicely. The pamphlet is a warning to the people

"People are hereby warned that efforts are on to send them to Nagpur by false instigation — where you will be entering some parts of the civilized area of the town with a so called 'national flag' and you will have to be arrested. The instigators tell you that this is your country's flag and you must give this sacrifice to uphold its honour. But know what the truth is. This flag neither belongs to your country nor to your ancestors. They had never heard of such a flag. There is no connection between this flag and your country's honour. During the last couple of years some Baboos have invented a political flag to show their connection with the Congress. The leaders of the non-co operation movement want that you should go to jail. Do not, even by mistake, believe that the honour of country is involved with your imprisonment. Their only motive is to further their selfish ends. — That motive is to take the opportunity to prove that the Government is oppressive . . ."¹⁸

"You must know that all those who have gone to jail until now are sons of innocent farmers. The sons of businessmen, shopkeepers, pleaders or scholars do not join this procession. What can be the reason ? Because those who know how to read and write, understand that all this is foolish. The poor, illiterate, innocent people are trapped by their leaders' lies "

"One thing is very clear from this sample of lies. Those uneducated and illiterate people who have joined, are not hired as the Government had been saying till now — because authorities themselves say that the leaders do not give them any

thing — they go only because of the misunderstanding about the national flag. Another thing is that all the arguments of the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Hailey are based on the argument that the leaders are not prepared to sacrifice anything. Which means it is based on lies. It is not possible that even a villager of the Central Provinces does not know that Jamnalal, Bhagwandeem, Neelkanthrao and Vinoba are in jail. There is no reason to believe that even illiterate villagers are idiotic like Mr. Hailey. If they have the strength that the farmers of Kheda had in giving a reply to Mr. Pratt, they will positively say, 'How many of your ancestors understood the Union Jack?'

"But the fact is that there is no need to give a reply to such lies. When all the people in the country are going to Nagpur whom could Mr. Hailey cheat with his stories?"

"A proper reply will have to be given for the shooting. The leaders of the Nagpur movement are in jail, the selected warriors of Kheda have come, scholarly warriors from the far off Tamil province have followed, and only yesterday we have sent Dr. Chandulal and his brave army to jail. Dr. Hardikar is already there and another doctor will join him. But our contribution does not end there. We have to send still more courageous warriors than we have already done. Vallabhbhai said in the meeting held to felicitate the Broach soldiers, 'Jivanlal Diwan and Balubhai Thakore are daily asking to be sent to Nagpur.' Dr. Kanunga is also keen to go. And after bidding them farewell, Vallabhbhai himself will go. Women are protesting against the rule of 35 years age for joining. Before the Government prepares for shooting, he (a member of the Council of the Governor of Bengal) must decide at how many places the battle should be fought. At Nagpur? In Gujarat? In Tamil Province? or in United Provinces? Jamnalal was accused of helping in a crime. Who does not help in the crime? Actually the Government should have arrested all the members of the Congress Committee, because the movement expanded to gigantic proportions only after the Committee's resolution. Those people who send volunteers should be arrested. The editors of the newspapers supporting the Nagpur Satyagraha should be arrested. All these people are today anxious to be arrested. But the Government does not have the strength to start a conflagration by arresting them all. Should we have to answer the Government's shooting when we are observing the festival of self-sacrifice? It will not be difficult to think that the Government will have to answer. Once we fought a battle, got tired of the fight, God has once again given us a chance of a

battle The conduct of the battle this time is such that we cannot get tired....²⁰

In the two issues of 3rd and 17th June 1923 of *Navajivan*, Mahadev printed his translation of the two famous songs (एकला चलेंगे and ताहले भावनाकरा चलव ना) of Rabindranath on the first page. These songs became extremely popular probably even more than they had become in Bengal during the Swadeshi movement And when the translations were read to Poet Tagore, he was simply charmed with them.

Mahadev had to write about Khadi, prohibition and communal unity He was as enthusiastic about these constructive work programmes, as he was about the civil disobedience, and therefore, his articles had the same eagerness about upholding the constructive work programme as found in Gandhiji's articles.

Sir Abdur Rahim, desirous of being favourite of the Government, tried to persuade Muslim children in his address at a school to believe that Khadi work was against Islam Mahadev replied to that in *Young India* of 22nd March 1923 Some excerpts are quoted here :

"Sir Abdur Rahim seems to have had a strangely sudden, thought, we are afraid, much too belated awakening, as regards the spirit of Islam Presiding over the Calcutta Madrasah prize-giving ceremony he delivered himself of the following notions, in the course of an address devoted to the spirit of Islamic culture, and meant for the boys of tender age :

'One observation irresistibly occurs to me in this connection that the new cult of *charkha* and Khaddar, the symbol of Non-co operation, implying as it does aloofness from the world and abandonment of all earnest effort to utilise the resources of nature for the ever-growing needs of an expanding humanity, is repugnant to the entire spirit of Islam and the history of Islamic civilisation. In fact I refuse to believe that any Moslem, however fervently and even sincerely he may, in the blinding heat of political strife and passion, advocate such a formula, can ever regard it as consistent with the ideals of Islamic civilization It can never kindle genuine enthusiasm in Moslem breasts What distinguishes Islam above all is its unparalleled power of absorption and assimilation and to this characteristic of the Islamic system the doctrine of isolation from the main currents of the world's activity is wholly antagonistic. There is no *sannyasism* in Islam.'

"We cannot resist drawing an obvious inference from the above, that Mussalman children are fast taking to the 'cult of

the *charkha* and Khaddar': or their teachers are at least preaching it. There must have been something like this which provoked Sir Abdur Rahim's warning. We cannot think he administered a groundless warning. But we may assure him that it has fallen on deaf ears, for the children know better than Sir Abdur Rahim himself. They are sure that their mothers are as good Mussalmans as Sir Abdur, that the Ali Brothers and a host of other names that they hold dear are also as good Mussalmans, and the poorest of them know better than Sir Abdur could ever know, that the *charkha* can bring them their bread, and Khaddar can give their poor family some money at least.

"But all of them are misguided fanatics, Sir Abdur Rahim might perhaps retort. May we ask to hark back, not to centuries ago, but only as far back as the time when the East India Company appeared on the scene to deprive the poor spinner and the weaver of his honest bread? Were they all *sannyasis* wedded to the doctrine of isolation? They were, we are sure, very much alive, and very much more in touch with daily life and with humanity, than Sir Abdur Rahim himself. By giving vent to his peculiar notion of the spirit of Islam, which is one of the most democratic religions of the world he has only shown his ignorance of the spirit of Islam. A cult which glorifies the doctrine of the honest bread of toil can be anything but repugnant to a democratic religion.

"If Sir Abdur Rahim knows little about his religion, he knows less about his country. It was not only in the days of the East India Company, that there were colonies of Mussalman spinners - there were lakhs of them in the United Provinces - but there are vast tracts even today where hundreds and thousands of Mussalman women win their daily bread by plying their *charkhas* with Allah on their lips. They know that nothing can please Allah better than honest bread labour, as they know that it was the Prophet who said that 'the best occupation for the believing women is the *charkha*!'

M H D.²¹

In those days Muslim leaders and Aryasamajists conducted programmes of conversion called *tabligh* and *shuddhi*. The article written under the title "Prayer to Shraddanandji", regarding conversion is worthy of thought even today :

"The condition which has been brought about in the Agra region of the United Provinces is causing anxiety. On one hand there is a telegram 'Thousands of Malkana Rajputs have been converted as Aryas through the *Shuddhi* rite, the original

Hindus and the new Aryas have dined together' etc. On the other, in a paper named *Khilafat* a news item states. 'In the districts of Aligarh, Agra, Mathura, Menpuri, a meeting of thousands of Malkana Rajputs has been in progress for the last twenty-six hours. It will continue. In this meeting those Rajputs have declared that they were Muslims and they will remain Muslims. They have expressed sorrow for having given up Islam even for a short time. Money and men are required.' On one hand Shradhdhanandji is asking for men and money, on the other Maulavi Saheb is asking for money and men, as if preparing for a battle.

"Religious belief is a personal matter. Everyone has the complete freedom to accept any religion which appears to one's mind of having the purest and life giving essence in it. Only a knowledgeable person has the right to explain which is the purest religious belief amongst many, and to guide those who do not understand. These are the common rules for religious beliefs. Different religions have adopted different methods to spread their religions. The religions of the people who travel, of those who are sea-faring, are those who propagate them; while the Aryans who consider that Aryavarta is everything to them, have not wanted to spread their religion. A man born as a follower of any other religion can become a Muslim or a Christian if he prefers certain rites of either of those two religions; but a man not born as a Hindu is not accepted as a Hindu even if he observes the rites and customs of the Hindu religion. (At the moment I am not thinking of the principles of Arya Samaj.) If we glance at the history it will be evident that a portion of the entire Hindu population is likely to have been non-Hindus at some time in the past. There is no evidence as to who converted them to Hinduism nor of when they were converted. But it is clear that Hinduism has accepted them. And so there would be nothing unnatural if Hinduism rekindles its past generosity today. Actually it becomes its duty. Those Hindus who were forcefully converted to Islam during the Mopla uprising in Malabar had never become Muslims. And it was a clear duty of the Hindu society to accept them as Hindus.

"Islam is a religion which organises and spreads itself. But nowhere can we find justification of forced conversion. The *ayats* (stanzas) of Quran-e-Sharif say thus: One *ayat* says, 'Force is not justified at all in matter of religion.' Another one says, 'Do your work through straight and simple talk and lectures where the road to God is concerned without any trickery, with arguments conducted in an humble and pleasant

manner ' A third says, 'Work and talk with people in a very soft manner, using very soft words ' Thus if anyone claims that forcible conversion to Islam is justified in spite of these clear instructions, that claim is wrong, and so the Muslim leaders and religious Muslim men of the whole country had censured the force used by the Moplas A lot of emphasis is laid on true faith in a religion originally based on oneness of God. Those who recite vocally *Lailah Illallah* (God is one) but do not believe in one God cannot be accepted as Muslims by Islam That belief itself is so profound that a mere tap of compulsion shatters it to pieces Thus there are many difficulties in the way of getting crowds of millions to explain and adopt the pious refrain, (*Lailah Illallah*). There is no meaning at all in forcibly making Mussalmans of those who do not accept this holy *mantra*.

"And so if the Mussalmans today, by erecting camps at various places, try to rapidly convert all to Islam, that exercise will not only have no meaning, but no one will tolerate it

"But today the question is somewhat different. The Malkana Rajputs among whom Swami Shraddhanandji has been conducting the procedure of *shuddhi*, have been known as Muslims for a long time. The Hindus should accept those amongst that group who do not fulfil the four duties of Islam and live as Hindus, without any rite of *shuddhi* It is time that the society should not accept rank injustice, and so it would be best if we could remove that injustice at the earliest But the injustice against the Malkana Rajputs has not been such injustice Islam itself would refuse to accept those who do not perform the duties of the Mussalman and those who are not ready to call out *Lailah Illallah* So nothing need be done about them But whatever is happening today is like opening healed wounds It is likely to encourage bitterness and enmity by pin-pricking the Muslim community One who is not ready to go and do *ibadat* (pray) in a mosque can perform *puja* in the home but to stop crowds from performing *puja* at home and to drag them to the temples — many of whom, if the news in *Khilafat* are correct, — declare their penitence for the *shuddhi* — is to unnecessarily sow the seeds of quarrel. It is not necessary to indicate how terrible it will be for the present movement because of this great shock to unity The small amount of work achieved by Gandhiji through a lot of penance and effort would be of no avail if a tumult starts due to even one indiscriminate act of ours. And so I appeal to Swami Shraddhanandji to give up his activity or to suspend it We can

suspend it till we get Swarajya, and then all quarrels could be settled through negotiations and persuasion. The duty of the Congress Working Committee and the Khilafat Committee is to meet Shradhdhanandji as well as the Maulvis who are contending against him and persuade them to leave the problem, to be decided by the people's will."²²

Mahadev, who normally spoke and wrote sweetly and charmingly, did not retreat in giving a stinging reply to any argument against Gandhiji or to the criticism of a subject upheld by him. Some instances are quoted below :

"... if he has properly read history, it will not be necessary to tell him that other kings did not spill an unarmed population's blood. Their lootings and killings were like a plague, which used to subside like the tumour of plague when properly treated. But the British Government firstly disarmed the people and made them worthless, and then released wilful oppression on those weaponless people. If other powers were like plague, this Government is like a cancer, for which there is no remedy either for its seriousness or for its terror. Plague either kills immediately or is completely cured. Cancer eats into the body in a tortuous way and brings on its end."²³

"The problem is that the Government would not be ashamed to become bankrupt, would the country also become bankrupt? Even the poor have the wealth of morality. Our poor country is on the verge of bankruptcy."²⁴

Or,

"Magistrates today are not the servants of Justice. They are the servants of the Government."²⁵

Or,

"In other provinces the Assembly members agitate to get the political prisoners released, but the functions of the Bombay Government are so skilful that its Assembly members acquiesce in all those functions as if tamed."²⁶

Or,

"Sir Surendranath Bannerjee has got such a section of Municipal Law amended in the Bengal Assembly, that although his party members may feel embarrassed or not, the country will be facing utter humiliation. He has got such a law passed that all those sitting in the Municipal Council should take an Oath of Allegiance to the King Emperor. Not only that but if the Government declares that any member has broken that Oath, such a member can be immediately dismissed."²⁷

Mahadev wrote about the flogging of the Mulshi Peta Satyagrahis in jail, "When shall we feel that all the stripes given to

those brethren who have gone to jail after meritorious service and who obey every jail rule scrupulously, are being struck on the body of the country ?”²⁸

Mahadev recollects “Adiparva” on hearing the news of Gandhiji’s arrest :

“In the beginning of ‘Adiparva’ (‘Udyogparva’ ?) Sanjay has been described narrating how Dhritarashtra had guessed that his side will not win. ‘I have no doubt that many incidents have occurred which have destroyed us’, says Dhritarashtra repeatedly to Sanjay and the words he utters are as much memorable as they are pathetic. One statement is, ‘When I heard that the pious Pandavas went to the forest in a particular manner and that thousands of learned people, Brahmanas and great men followed them, I became convinced that victory will not be ours.’ In the same way, it will not be surprising if many Englishmen may have unwittingly said, ‘It seems to be the end of this Empire’, when Gandhiji was sent to prison — especially when they would have heard of millions of people shedding tears, and when they heard that the entire country obeyed his order to maintain peace. It would not be surprising if the same Englishmen might say the same thing again on hearing about this strike. Only we would wish that such forecast may be loud enough to burst our ear-drums and clear enough to foresee.”²⁹

Mahadev had almost opened a second front in Gujarat for the Flag Satyagraha of Nagpur. From Nagpur Vallabhbhai sent the smallest details about the Satyagraha and Mahadev would get volunteers and funds for the movement, through his articles prepared from these details. In between Mahadev also visited Nagpur and presented a picture of the movement, of the enthusiasm and penance of the Satyagrahis to the people of Gujarat. It is likely that Gujarat was leading the whole country in the matter of giving help to the Nagpur Satyagrahis. The primary reason for this was the duet from Nagpur and Ahmedabad played out by Vallabhbhai and Mahadev.

During those very days the Satyagraha of Guruka Bagh in Punjab took place. Mahadev did not go to see that. It is doubtful whether anyone else suffered the torture, the Sikh brethren went through with courage and smile on their face in that *Satyagraha*. A dispute over possession of the trees on the land of a Gurudwara (Sikh religious place), named Guruka Bagh arose between two Sikh factions, one being the progressive Akalis of the Shiromani Akali Prabandhak Samiti and the other being the old-fashioned Sikhs known as Udasins. The Akalis wanted to take possession of that Bagh. The religious chief of the Udasins had asked for the help of the police to prevent them from taking possession. Akalis were

pledged to conduct this movement openly and totally non-violently. The police had transgressed every decency in beating with *lathis*, the disciplined groups of 25 Sikh volunteers. But Akalis, aware of the daily *lathi*-charges, on the appointed days and time passed along the road in front of the police-*chowkies* near Guruka Bagh, peacefully, and faced the *lathi*-charge. The Government also accepted that the Akalis had shown complete self-restraint in this matter. Its only complaint was that the press did not take note of the amount of restraint the police had to observe to carry out an unpleasant duty. The Akalis' Satyagraha had shown to what extent a courageous people could prove the power of non-violence. Mahadev's notes appeared in the periodical for months after the arrests of the Akalis. Akalis regularly brought out pamphlets on the torture inflicted upon their volunteers in jail. Mahadev printed them in their entirety in *Navajivan*. At more than one places, he added that if there was untruth in these news he wondered why the Government did not object to it.

The historian of the Congress, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya had described this Satyagraha as an object lesson of non-violence given by a courageous militant tribe of India. Mahadev described it as under :

"The importance of this struggle is much more than some other struggles. The unparalleled Satyagraha of the Akalis was to prove a religious right. Volunteers of other communities had asked for participation in the Satyagraha, but the Akalis had refused and it was right."³⁰

Gandhiji's English friend, Mr. Andrews, went to see the Guruka Bagh Satyagraha. He gave a description enough to create a turmoil in the heart. "It is one of the most moving and pathetic sights I have ever seen," said he, "the triumph of non-violence is so complete. It is to the men a real martyrdom."

Regarding the *lathi*-charge, callously inflicted on peaceful groups, Mr. Macpherson, the English Superintendent of Police, an author of a book on *lathi*-exercises, bears testimony as follows :

"It is quite possible that some injuries, such as fractures, may have occurred. The *jathas* did not resist the police at any time, being quite non-violent. It is possible that some of the injured became unconscious. Nine hundred and fifty-three cases of injuries had been tabulated, two hundred and sixty-nine above the trunk, three hundred on the front of the body, seventy-nine brain, sixty to genitals, nineteen to perinaeum, seven to teeth and one hundred and fifty eight contused wounds, eight incised, two punctured, forty urine trouble, nine fractures and two dislocations."³¹

The note written by Mahadev in the extra issue of the *Navajivan* dated 18th April 1923 about the Guruka Bagh Satyagraha of the Akalis is very important :

"Inhuman tortures were inflicted upon the brave Akalis. Scenes which even Gandhiji could not imagine were reported in history I believe, in all humility, that had Gandhiji been free at the time, he would have camped in the Punjab. He would have made that sanctified land more fruitful by greater Satyagraha — pure civil disobedience. But our great leaders could not find much meaning in that immortal example and the invaluable opportunity for which Gandhiji was eagerly waiting, which he would have immediately utilised, was allowed to slip away by us."³²

In the same way a Muslim member of the police force resigned from his service when Akalis were tortured in Muktsar, the next year. Hearing about this Mahadev wrote :

"A policeman, named Hasankhan, resigned because he could not tolerate the tortures inflicted on the Akalis near the Muktsar Darbarsaheb. Once again the days like those of last November seem to be here. Last year there were some Gorkhas who resigned as a result of the manner in which the Akalis were tortured."³³

Thus Mahadev attempted to nourish the national movement by welcoming any experiment in non-violence, conducted in any part of the country

By 1923 Mahadev's popularity had developed to such an extent that just being an Editor of *Navajivan* was not enough. Even had he wished it, people would not have allowed him to do so. And so he was invited to a number of small and big conferences organised in Gujarat. On such occasions Mahadev used to remind the people that the resolve to start spinning wheels in the country was as yet unfulfilled. He would talk about removal of untouchability and prohibition. He never failed to draw attention to the constructive work. A resolution had been passed in the Congress that there should be one Satyagrahi for every three to four thousand persons of the population. Mahadev also repeatedly reminded the people of this. His main work was to preserve the righteous passion of the country which was at war.

Here is an example of a talk, given in Surat at a reception

"After our disappointment in North India, we have built great hopes having come here. Specially the prevalence of Khadi in this district is very encouraging. There is no need to be disappointed about women till the venerable mother of Dayalji is moving amongst us. Dayalji who never

retreats in spite of numerous disappointments will be with us to take our account within four months. There is no need for the youths to feel dismayed till Kalyanjibhai is there with his group. How can we be despondent when experts like Abbas Sahib who can outdo the young in performing their duty, are there amongst us? How can we utter words of fatigue and cowardice? Which country with a population of 300 millions had at anytime taken to a righteous struggle? A number of years had passed before even those who fought for freedom with arms could become independent, while we, however, have to fight the battle with tough implements of non-violence and non co-operation. How can we become impatient? We have drawn the attention even by our incomplete battle of the courageous people of Germany who want to imitate us. How can we lose enthusiasm? We have to present to the world a peaceful war strategy which has never been used before. And that present can only be through non-co-operation built on the immovable foundation of the constructive work programme".³⁴

When Mahadev had to speak on his most favourite topic, Gandhiji, he used to radiate light like a full moon. His address in a public meeting on Gandhi Jayanti, on 2nd October 1923, at Ahmedabad was one which could be appreciated in a gathering of scholars. Only one who had digested his philosophy could give the gist of Gandhian thought in one lecture. A few excerpts are given.

Quoting from the fifteenth verse of the twelfth discourse of the Gita, 'he causes no trouble to the world nor the world can give him trouble', Mahadev said, "The gist of Gandhiji's life is expressed by this." To prove this contention of a devotee Gandhiji enveloped his life with two great vows of truth and non-violence. He quoted a passage written to him by Gandhiji, the last sentence of which was, "I myself have no value for my penance . . . my truth is mine indeed . . . my non-violence is formidable. And the Satyagraha born out of the meeting of the two is indescribable."³⁵

Comparing the national political situation before and after 1919, Mahadev explained the inner meaning of truth and non-violence. To explain it he quoted two precepts from Patanjali, 'Revenge is abandoned in the presence of a *yogi* who had achieved non-violence', and 'A man of truth attains fulfilment of speech. His speech becomes unfailing.'³⁶

In reference to the sporadic incidents of violence in the country, Mahadev said, "The Government has harmed itself by imprisoning Gandhiji. Various kinds of poison were surfacing because nectar, in the form of truth and non violence, was taken away from the people." At the end, Mahadev expressed the hope that, "Over a

period of time we will realise our mistake of not recognising our invaluable wealth, that over a time we would have in us the real attachment to duty, and that over a period of time the power-crazy Government would realise wherein lies its genuine well being."³⁷

But Mahadev did not fail to express his differences with Gandhiji even though he believed him to be and called him 'a wonderful incarnation of truth and non-violence'. Gandhiji believed 'under the prevailing conditions only a political recluse could glorify renunciation of the world, all others would be putting their saffron robes to shame by their behaviour'.³⁸ Mahadev believed this to be an exaggeration. And he had an argument with Gandhiji when he was writing the Foreword to the translation of Gokhaleji's speeches when Gandhiji insisted that Shankaracharya, Dayanand, Paramhansa and such others also should be included among the political recluses. Mahadev argued, "So you exclude the wandering friars, do you? Would you call the souls who have realised Self as those putting their saffron robes to shame?" Gandhiji then said, "No, I would certainly not say that. I have only said that renouncing the world without realising the Self, is false." Accepting this Gandhiji corrects it to "others would more or less be putting their saffron robes to shame". Mahadev commented, "By adding 'more or less', he saved some of the recluses from his charge, but I do not believe that his distrust about such recluses was removed from his mind." Whilst criticising Gandhiji, the devotee in Mahadev woke up and he clarified, "The reason for this is clear. He saw so much of hypocrisy and imposture that only to remove that and for nothing else, he went in for accomplishing *karmayoga* (effort at action)."³⁹

Mahadev believed that through the values of truth and non-violence Gandhiji had given a new dimension to national politics. There was enmity towards the British in the politics before 1919. Mahadev described three types of politicians of that period. One group which appealed to the Government and which did not grasp the people's strength, another group which showed its resentment towards the Government and invited its repercussions, and the third group competing with the Government in fraud and deceit. Gandhiji's truth and non-violence totally changed the foundation of all three groups. Because of that, thousands of people gave up enmity by willingly going to prison, the majority of the population became fearless. The time for appeals had gone and in Gandhiji's words, only the 'diplomacy of truth' remained. Thus the introduction of truth and non-violence gave a new dimension to Indian politics. Mahadev said that the Government which was thousands of miles away from truth and non-violence, harmed themselves by imprisoning Gandhiji and removing him by thousands of miles from

the people. Always in his addresses, Mahadev analysed Indian history and politics from Gandhiji's point of view.

The Government pleader had described articles written by Kakasaheb as objectionable. His opinion was that they were seditious. Mahadev commented on that :

"He considered, the sentence relating to the necessity to come into conflict with the Government, as very severe. Just as the Government cannot tolerate sedition, the people cannot tolerate treachery towards themselves. The Government has been treacherous to the people by many acts. Gandhiji talked himself hoarse whilst enumerating those acts. The Government imprisoned him to stop him from lecturing to it (the Government) and yet did not stop from committing treachery to the people. Even the Government pleader could not state that the Government was free of the charge of beating and insulting non-violent people. . . . We know that the Government does not consider these acts as vile as we consider them. We have faith that the Government has not deteriorated to the extent as to continue to commit the acts which it considers vile. And that is the reason why the people have taken up non-violent non-co-operation to remind them of their sins so that they may repent for them."⁴⁰

Mahadev advised caution when the movement was weakening

"There is a tendency to say, — when the violence has erupted at various places how can we stop the carnage? The consequence of this is sliding into co-operation. To rush forward believing that there is no carnage is another tendency. This would bring destruction. The third tendency is to do whatever is possible to help in reducing the carnage in a quiet manner. In this there is discretion. There is a hope of once again being able to do something. Take up a field of work, strengthen the basic principles in that field, get together with people, live amongst the people and show them the road to prosperity through your own actions. This advice is born of the third tendency."⁴¹

Mahadev's writings became more effective because he used real examples. Here is an instance :

"A fruit-vendor at Jabbalpore station, touched our clothes and said with a slight embarrassment, as well as joy, 'Sir, is this Khadi?' 'Yes, it is. Why have you not put on Khadi?' His face clouded with sorrow. I will give his answer omitting the words of abuse he used. 'This is a slaughter-house. This is not a station. I won't be allowed here if I put on Khadi. Away from here, in the bazaar, I put on nothing but Khadi.' "

What a horrible state of affairs ! It is hardly surprising that those who did not hesitate to order the burning of spinning-wheels, those who did not stop burning the Khadi cap, would order the station employees to tyrannise over such people earning their livelihood from small businesses. One cannot understand why the employees at the station are so cowed down. The railway companies are not in a position to stop their work even for a day, if all of them get together and decided to wear only Khadi. That fruit-vendor's sentence, 'this is a slaughter-house', shocked and pained me terribly. He might not be aware of its complete meaning but to me it seems to apply to the whole nation. How can you say that every soul is not being destroyed when our own people trample upon our freedom: when our own people are surrounded by petty selfishness, being deaf to the inner voice, when there are those who do not perform their duty and stop others from doing theirs ? And what else could it be called but a 'slaughter house', where such destruction takes place every day ?⁴²

At such times relating incidents that happened to Satyagrahis themselves or of their kith and kin is likely to prove more effective for the workers. Bhaktiba (Darbar Gopaldas's wife) said in Nagpur when her husband was sentenced to six months' rigorous and one month's simple imprisonment. "Oh ! He got six sweetmeat balls made of sugar and one made of jaggery."⁴³ Mahadev did not lose the opportunity to mention this comment in the *Navajivan*. The following incident of Narasingpur in Madhya Pradesh was really tragic but stimulating :

"Shankarlal of Narasingpur was arrested after which his wife fainted and died within a few hours. Just before the death, the relatives informed him and suggested giving a bail for him to go and see his wife. He could have acted accordingly. But he flatly refused. He felt very much hurt at the suggestion of being released on bail. When he got the news of his wife's death, he merely said, 'Put on Khadi as the shroud and perform the final rites. There are enough relatives outside to perform the rites.' Shankarlal was courageous, not a coward."⁴⁴

During this very period the people of Borsad had been fully successful in their Satyagraha against a punitive tax. Mahadev had moved a lot in the Borsad villages with Vallabhbhai. So it was not surprising that the description of that movement filled a number of pages of *Navajivan*. Mahadev had given in *Navajivan* almost verbatim Vallabhbhai's thought provoking address after the success at Borsad. In that address he heard the echoes of Gandhiji's words.

Mahadev also described the Cocanada Congress with equal enthusiasm. He used to keep the national movement alive through such descriptions.

Mahadev's extensive reading and scholarly attributes made it easy for him to cull effective examples from the literature of other countries, which he used in order to propound his views. Here is a striking example of Mahadev's use of the history of the Roman Empire to emphasise a point :

"I am reminded of an ancient Roman story. Once upon a time there was no end to Rome's pomp and splendour. The Emperor stayed in a palace of marble or gold and a number of sports took place in the majestic colosseum. When the Christians were ruthlessly oppressed, they saved themselves by hiding themselves in the cellars. In those days there used to be various types of fun and frolic at the colosseum. The galleries used to be packed with forty to fifty thousand people and they eagerly waited to see the battles between wild animals, Christians being devoured by lions, and one sportsman defeating and killing another sportsman. When there was a fight between men, the fighters were chosen either from the criminals or from the slaves. Those who became afraid, once they came to fight, were aroused by whip-lashes or iron-rods. When either of them became wounded the spectators applauded, the winner made a sign to ask whether to kill or spare the defeated. The spectators got the defeated warrior killed or spared according to their fancy.

"For years together these wild and cruel sports went on. The people's minds had also become cruel, witnessing these sights. As the Christian influence gradually increased disgust arose for such things. But actually even the Christians did not have a genuine disgust. An incident had been given in the confessions of St. Augustine. One of his friends was forcibly taken to the colosseum. He closed eyes as he could not tolerate those sights. Just then there was a crisis in the game and all of the others shouted. His eyes opened due to the shouts. On seeing drops of blood flying off, he also felt a desire to watch it; the mind was pained, but the eyes watched.

"This condition remained for 400 years after Christ. And then a terrific incident took place. The Goths attacked Rome. At that time the Roman Emperor was insane. Rome was on the point of defeat. But then a brave Commander came on the scene and drove away the Goths. The happiness that day was unbounded. As a matter of course, the people, full of joy, went to the colosseum. There were games between wild animals. Many animals were killed. Then soldiers as before came out with swords and spears. People started watching with joy. Then a wonderful thing happened. An old man came and stood in the

arena. He did not have a cap on his head or shoes on his feet. He started preventing people from fighting and wounding others. The crowds shouted at him to stop his chatter and go away from there. The warriors also came forward and pushed him. But he again rushed towards them and stood between them. And so the angry crowds showered stones at him, and the soldiers did not delay in crushing him to pieces. The old man died before the Roman spectators.

"This old man was a monk named Telemacus. Fed up of the cruelties of this world, this monk used to stay in the forests on the mountains. He had come to a temple in Rome, and he saw men crowding the colosseum. Taking pity on their wretchedness, he went to stop their cruelty or to court death. He died. But his death was not wasted. Many compassionate hearts were rent asunder on hearing of his death, and there was a strong revolt against the cruelty of the city. It resulted in the complete stoppage of battles taking place in the colosseum. Telemacus saved thousands by dying himself.

"The quarrels between Hindus and Muslims to day seem to be like the battles of the Gladiators. Would there be a Telemacus from both the communities?"⁴⁵

In the same way as the incident from Roman history, Mahadev had presented to the non-co-operators of India, a narration bringing to life an incident of peaceful non-co-operation which occurred in Ruhr — an area of France under German occupation after the First World War during the modern times.

But Mahadev did not use his extensive reading only to present examples of non co-operation from other nations. He was always keen to present to the readers of *Navajivan* any remarkable thing he read about in foreign newspapers or periodicals. The *Strand Magazine* had requested some of the great men of the world to describe seven wonders each from their point of view. The M.P. of the Labour Party of England, Mr. Chine described the hutments of England as the first wonder and said, 'Bravo' for the Christian people who tolerate the circumstances that give rise to this wonder.¹

Mahadev commented after describing some such wonders, "It should also be considered a great wonder that our land — attractive to the whole world — is in the clutches of a small number of Englishmen!"⁴⁶

During the period of Mahadev's editorship, the Navajivan Press had started printing books. Later on it became the Navajivan Publishing House (Navajivan Prakashan Mandir). Mahadev got a special kind of book printed under his own guidance. That was the

edition of *Hind Swaraj* in Gandhiji's handwriting. He wrote about this book in the note titled, 'Gandhiji's handwriting in every home' -

"I have seen many people lovingly preserving a small piece of paper with Gandhiji's handwriting — at least have tried to do it. Gandhiji has a fascination for matter written in his hand. He insisted on writing important letters, letters to special friends, with his own pen of reed and also insisted that the letters he dictated to me should be hand-written and not typed. The reason he gave for this was that printed matter is lifeless while there is life in a hand-written one. It is difficult to say whether everyone's writing has life or not, but the personality does peep out from the handwriting. Gandhiji's magic seemed to shine out from every syllable. A poet has called poetry as the 'art of the soul'. Handwriting also in a way is the art of the soul. Very often I felt how nice it would be if we could give Gandhiji's articles in his own handwriting in *Navajivan* and *Young India*.' That is not possible, but by God's grace we are able to give to Gujarat, *Hind Swaraj*, the Gita of our age, in Gandhiji's handwriting. That book was written on the note-paper of the Shipping Company when he was going to South Africa from England on the steamship, *Kildonan Castle*. So the writing is uniform — merely the left hand had been used when he got tired writing with the right hand. It must indeed be some divine indication that those note-papers have been preserved as they are, till to-day. It would be presented to the Gujarati world on Gandhiji's birthday, once the 'blocks' are made. It is hoped that the readers will study the hand-written edition thoroughly and take to heart the valuable teachings of that Gita."⁴⁷

When Mahadev was with Vallabhbhai, how could Mahadev ever refrain from passing on his humour to the people? An incident about Cocanada Congress is given below :

"To go to Cocanada we have to change trains at Samalkot. But the engine of our train developed some defect on the way and it took two hours to reach Cocanada. There were Gujaratis in the compartment near the engine. The Ali Brothers were in the next compartment. So Mohammad Ali told Vallabhbhai on reaching Cocanada, 'Gujarat's leadership had failed', out came Vallabhbhai's reply, 'Ali Brothers' brakes were too heavy'!"⁴⁸

Mahadev was at that time, very fond of Maulana Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali. He printed a long interview with Mohammed Ali in the issue of the 4th November 1923 of *Navajivan* when the latter came to Ahmedabad. Mohammed Ali's description of a criminal prisoner Mahva, is such that can soften even a stony heart.

The Maulana once related that incident thrice in a day and said, "My head bows to Mahatma Gandhi and then also bows to that courageous Mahva. We are sure to win if we have even a few men like this. Mahva had pure repentance in his mind for his crime, he had fear of God and had espied his eyes at the time of death. That was the reason he was singing and dancing and he felt death to be like a sweet slumber."⁴⁹

The number of subscribers decreased when Mahadev was the Editor of the *Navajivan*. From the 40,000 copies being printed at one time, it had declined to about 6,000. Naturally, Mahadev blamed himself for the decline. It was a fact that the number of subscribers declined because Mahadev replaced Gandhiji as the Editor and because Mahadev could no longer take the readers round the country through his description of tours with Gandhiji. But that is not the only fact. The reason for the decline in the number was that the strength of the national movement in '23-'24 had not remained the same as it had been in 1920-21. The number of subscribers of a thought-provoking periodical like *Navajivan* increases and decreases with the pace of the movement. This was noticed years later even in relation to Gandhiji's *Harijan* periodicals. The number of subscribers of the *Harijan* increased considerably when the atmosphere was thick with the upcoming 'Quit India' movement. The number of subscribers remained as low even when Gandhiji took over the responsibility of *Navajivan* after being released from jail during this period. The reason given by Gandhiji at the time seemed to be more correct than Mahadev's thought of his own inadequacy as the Editor in place of Gandhiji, and that is relevant even for the time of Mahadev's editorship.

"The fact is that there is no excitement or heat in whatever I am presenting to the people. There is no hope of getting an immediate Swaraj. It is trying to put the same tools in a new form before the people. The interest of *Navajivan* is in its dryness. I am satisfied that those who believe in implements like spinning-wheels and others, subscribe to it as it is nourishing of Swaraj. It will go on till a certain number of subscribers are satisfied. Those, who consider the spinning-wheel as a strong implement for Swaraj, those, who consider it an effective remedy for removing the poverty of India, will not get tired of *Navajivan*. I have no doubt that the patient and the faithful will realise to-morrow, if not to-day, the power of that implement, and the *Navajivan* reader need never have that doubt."⁵⁰

Mahadev further wrote about *Navajivan* to Devdas .

"This time also Bapu's matter came in an awkward manner. Awkward for the printer, and not because of anyone's fault, except that of the Governor and Superintendent that they troubled Bapu so much that he had to go into a lengthy correspondence. That matter fills up twelve and a quarter columns, and so how would the boys know what else to put in? And I am not in the press the whole day. Moreover, if they wait for me the paper will not come out the next day. And so the boys got annoyed and got the pages bound before I came! That is why it has not been printed as well as I would have wished it to be. Many corrections ought to have been made, but I have not made them because it is very troublesome for the printers once the pages are bound. And yet I have read the whole matter carefully. And from the assurance I got from the last reading, I can say that no mistakes regarding spellings or printing remain. I wanted to give a heading to each page but it is not possible as the pages have been bound.

"I have made changes at two places. Only Bapu can say whether they are proper. At one place Bapu has written that when he got permission to see the hunger-strikers of Mulshi Peta, he was accompanied by the Inspector General of 'Police'. I have corrected it to 'Prisons'. Whether I am wise or otherwise in the matter only you (Devdas) can tell me after asking Bapu. The second correction is in the phrase Bapu has used in the note to the Governor. He has written 'Draw out Regulation'. The meaning of draw out is to arrange properly. Could it be slip instead of draw? However, I have made it, 'draw up' and I feel that it is not wrong.

"Is any correspondence expected? — I hope we go on getting such matters! Or else people would become despondent. Actually the people have quietened down so much that it will take at least six months to make them enthusiastic. There is a rush on *Young India* since Bapu's matter had been coming. But the 'rush' is not like that of 1921. Only 500 subscribers were added last month. Only 200 to *Navajivan*. And if we look at the figure of 1921, we have a very long way to go."

Then Mahadev spoke out his mind:

"Very often I feel that if I am with Bapu, I can run both the papers well, with Bapu's suggestions. But it may be excessive greed or jealousy towards all of you. I am writing this in the letter only to relieve my mind. To run both the periodicals is about impossible. It is a different story when we get twelve columns of Bapu's correspondence.

"Last time I wrote 'Immortal Akalis'. I do not know whether Bapu liked it or not ! I wrote it because I considered it proper. But I would feel miserable if Bapu feels hurt or embarrassed by any of my articles. And I do believe that the pages of *Navajivan* and *Young India* cannot be filled with the news items only about Khadi. Any lasting exclamations about spinning in Hakimji's letter can appear any time, otherwise I believe that if the usual talks are given people do not even read them.

"And what about Khilafat ? *The Times* had given a very generous note . Is Bapu going to say anything ? You must inform me by a telegram if there is anything. I will take it that you will not refrain from sending a telegram when it is necessary.

"I had gone to Shraddhanandji's lecture yesterday. The whole address was an innocent one — on *brahmacharya* , on *varnashrama* and such other matters. Swamiji has lost his lustre. His speech on *brahmacharya* was not as brilliant as in the past. I think that Kaka and Vinoba and even you would speak better even in Hindi. The Government had stationed some police-constables near Premabhai Hall and the Mussalmans were prohibited from going to the hall. The police were stopping every Muslim. (The reason must be that the Muslims had troubled Swamiji a lot in Surat.)

"But to-day's speech is important. To-day he is going to expound that the spirit of Hinduism has been destroyed and it could be rejuvenated only through a properly organised Hindu Sabha. I was to go. But it is just 8 p.m. and the last page for *Young India* was sent before I started writing this letter. The lecture was at 6.30 p.m. Haribhau and Ramdas have gone, so I will get the report from them.

"The letter has become lengthy and Durga must be cursing me at home. Because everyday I reach home late. And Durga's nature has commenced to become irritable since her illness. So I will stop here. If I go on writing to you, I can write not eight but eighty pages and vainly struggle to get eight pages from you in reply to those eighty. But what can be done ? I cannot write the eighty neither can you the eight pages.

"Do at least write what those Akalis did when they came there ! What is Pyara doing ? Can't he write something ? Should I complain about him to Bapu ? Can I write a letter to Bapu ? I shall do so if you give permission.

Lovingly yours,
Mahadev."

P S. A debate on Birth Control is going on at the Gujarat Vidyapith I and the President Kripalani, Kaka and other professors are the speakers. It would have been fun, had you been there !"⁵.

We should take a note of the fact that during the editorship of *Navajivan* the lasting feeling in Mahadev's heart was that of separation. Without Gandhiji his heart was fluttering like a fish out of water. At the end of the first year of Gandhiji's six years' sentence, Mahadev's article titled "Pain of Separation" gave a vivid conception of his keen sense of separation. He was reminded of the pain Bharat experienced. Actually, Mahadev's own condition was like that of Bharat without Rama, looking after the work on Rama's behest, like an ascetic. He wrote about the movement, and wrote firmly about it. But behind every argument there was a personal feeling, the loving feeling that we must bring success to the movement through our efforts and get Gandhiji released from jail before his sentence was completed.

Mahadev got agitated at times on the weakening of the movement. Thinking of Bharat's devotion he asked, "In a country where there is extreme penance born out of excessive devotion and pain of separation, has the sense of duty become so extinct as to forget the pain of separation and descend to its former condition of disinclination towards duty and fondness for pleasure ?"

Although he was constantly experiencing the pain of separation, he had one satisfaction that he was spending several days only in co-ordinating Gandhiji's work according to his own understanding and capacity. Only because of that satisfaction could he understand the country's conditions with a composure, give renewed enthusiasm to the workers and volunteers, relate experiences about human relationships, and because of all this give literature useful to life, to the readers through the columns of *Navajivan*.

When at the end of 1921, Gandhiji insisted on sending Mahadev to Pandit Motilal Nehru at Allahabad, he had expressed a hope that Mahadev's capability would increase by being away from him. When they met at the beginning of 1924, Gandhiji must have noted that Mahadev's capability had increased.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, p. 3 (Guj.)
- 2 Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan-ni-Vikas-Varta*, pp. 108-109
- 3 M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 394
- 4 *CWMG* -16, p. 92
- 5 Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan-m-Vikas-Varta*, p. 62

6. Ibid. p. 63
7. Ibid. pp. 102 to 104 (selected)
8. *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, pp. 3, 4, selected (Guj.)
9. Ibid. pp. 4-5
10. Ibid. p. 7
11. Ibid., p. 9
12. *Correspondence of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Chopra -1, pp. 220-21
13. *CWMG* - 16, pp. 92-93
14. Ibid. p. 93
15. Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan-ni-Vikas-Varta*, pp. 126-27
16. *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, p. 328 (Guj.)
17. Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan-ni-Vikas-Varta*
18. Ibid. p. 328 (Guj.)
19. Ibid. p. 329
20. Ibid. p. 330
21. *Young India*, C. Rajagopalachari—Editor, Vol. V dt. 22-3 23
22. *M. D.'s Diary* -17, pp. 94 to 97 (Guj.)
23. Ibid. p. 65
24. Ibid. p. 60
25. Ibid. p. 25
26. Ibid. p. 27
27. Ibid. p. 45
28. P. Sitaramaiya, *The History of the Congress*, pp. 413 to 416
29. *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, pp. 87-88 (Guj.)
30. *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, p. 233 (Guj.)
31. Pattabhi Sitaramaiya, *The History of the Congress*, pp. 264-65
32. *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, p. 165 (Guj.)
33. Ibid. - 18, p. 240 (Guj.)
34. Ibid. - 17, pp. 20-21 (Guj.)
35. Ibid. 18, p. 163 - Footnote (Guj.)
36. Ibid. p. 164 - selected (Guj.)
37. Ibid. p. 165 - selected (Guj.)
38. Ibid., p. 167 (Guj.)
39. Ibid., p. 168 (Guj.)
40. Ibid. - 17, p. 23 (Guj.)
41. Ibid. - 18, p. 170 (Guj.)
42. Ibid. - 17 pp. 61-62 (Guj.)
43. Ibid. p. 334 (Guj.)
44. Ibid. p. 340 (Guj.)
45. Ibid. - 17, p. 350-51 (Guj.)
46. Ibid. - 17, pp. 259-60 (Guj.)
47. Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan-ni-Vikas-Varta*, pp. 112-13
48. *M. D.'s Diary* - 18, p. 327 (Guj.)
49. Ibid. p. 234 (Guj.)
50. Manibhai B. Desai, *Navajivan-ni-Vikas-Varta*, pp. 146-47
51. From the Correspondence, Gandhi Museum, Sabarmati (Guj.)

CHAPTER XXII

HARIBHAI PASSES AWAY

Mahadev's father, Haribhai, died suddenly at his native place, Dihen, on 2nd July 1923, about seven months after Mahadev was released from jail and before he officially took up the editorship of *Navajivan*.

Mahadev was in Ahmedabad at that time. He had gone for a short visit to Dihen when he went to attend the meeting of the Gujarat Provincial Committee on 10th June 1923 which was held in Surat. Haribhai was in good health at that time. But he became a bit unwell towards the end of June. He wrote a letter to Mahadev informing him of his indisposition. Immediately on receiving that letter Mahadev wrote back to say that he would reach Dihen on 1st July, accompanied by Dr. Ghia from Surat. But before he could start he received another letter from Haribhai stating that he was better and that there was no need to go to Dihen then. In the same letter Haribhai had asked Mahadev to send him *Navajivan* Prakashan Mandir's books and also one about indigenous colours. Mahadev was deceived by the tone of this letter. He felt that there was no immediate need to go. Moreover, he had to bring out a new issue of *Navajivan*, on Thursday, so he planned to go after bringing out the issue.

Mahadev received the news of Haribhai's demise the next day at Ahmedabad, that is the 3rd, by telegram. He completed writing the matter for *Navajivan* with tears streaming from his eyes and then started off for Dihen with Durgaben.

The mud-walled house at Dihen had two sections, the roof was of thin twisted bamboos and red tiles. The moment you entered the house you could see the person sitting in the backyard, behind the kitchen, through the middle room. Just prior to his death Haribhai was sitting on the chair in the front room reading. Ichhaben was busy in the kitchen. Shanta, Bachu (Nirmala), and Babu (Parmanand) were playing somewhere in the courtyard. Later on

Mahadev surmised that the pamphlet Haribhai was reading was *Navajivan*. A gentleman sitting near Haribhai told him, "You stop reading. You are not too well. Please rest!" Haribhai replied, "You are right." These were his last words. His head fell to one side and his eyes closed.

For a long time Mahadev regretted the fact that he could not serve his father during his last minutes. He could have experienced the consolation that his father died without suffering. But that thought did not seem to have occurred to him. He soon received a letter of condolence from Narahari who was at Sarbhan Ashram. In his reply Mahadev's grief was evident.

"If the supplement of the *Navajivan* did not have to be published on Thursday, and if I had not received my father's letter asking for books and directing me not to bring the doctor, I would have definitely gone to him on Sunday, the day prior to his death. I have been persistently feeling that because of our strange notions about serving the country, I deprived myself of the privilege of consoling him by being with him in his last hours. This regret will remain with me throughout my life as an unhealable wound."¹

In a letter written two days later to Pandit Jawaharlal he refers to the same thing.

"My father died suddenly on the 2nd instant from heart failure, when I was at the Ashram. Misfortune deprived me of the consolation of being with him during his last hours on earth. You, who have the privilege of having one of the wonderfully true fathers I have ever known, can imagine my sorrow. During the last six or seven years I have done whatever I liked because of him. It was he who kept me free of all anxiety about affairs at home and lovingly allowed me to do as I liked. Humble and worthless as I am he doted on me, as does Panditji on you. My terrible agony is that I have done nothing for him which by any stretch of imagination I can call service. He laboured and toiled for me, I enjoyed the fruits of his toil without ever repaying them. How will the Lord forgive me? As I was distressed by these thoughts I thought of Panditji, and have written a few lines to him, which you will please send him wherever he is if you think it will not trouble him in his illness."²

Jawaharlal could reply to this letter only in August. This answer indicates the dignity of his personality along with his warmth and affection,

"My dear Mahadev,

"It is curious that the letters we desire to write most should often get delayed. The casual note, the routine letter is

sent off and yet the letter which we are thinking of most remains unwritten. I have thought of you, and of the feeling note you sent me, every day since the 6th or 7th of August when it was delivered to me in Nagpur. The news came to me as I descended from the train at Nagpur station. Ramdas informed me. My heart went out to you in your sorrow for I knew well how you must be suffering. Some of us who have erred and sinned enough have grown hard in the ways of the world. But you in your innocence must find them more difficult and I can well understand your agony and your mood of self-condemnation.

"I have also the good fortune of having experienced to the full the depths of a father's love and many times I have wondered if I was repaying in any way the love and care that had been lavished upon me from the day of my birth. I have had to face that question often and every time I have felt terribly ashamed about it. Sometimes wider issues intervened and I was troubled and torn asunder and knew not what to do. I shall never forget the advice that Bapu gave me in those far off days of the Satyagraha Sabha when the conflict in my mind was almost too great for me to bear. His healing words lessened my difficulties and I had some peace. Do you remember those days in March 1919 when you and I first met at Delhi in Principal Rudra's House? We travelled, Bapu, you, I and the little doctor to Allahabad and then a day or (two) later you went to Lucknow or perhaps Benares. Anyway I accompanied you all at Bapu's suggestion to Partapgarh and on our way he and I had our talk. It was the first serious and fairly lengthy talk that I had with him. It was only four years ago and how terribly long ago it seems!

"I did not have the privilege of meeting your father, but you spoke to me about him in our little garden in the Civil Ward. I can well imagine him proud of his son and fully satisfied that all his trouble and labour had borne such fruit. You distress yourself needlessly. The lesson of service you learnt from your father you have carried to the outer world and have doubtless influenced many by your personal example. Your father could not have grudged this or preferred a narrow domestic sphere for you to the wider service of your country."

The letter written by Mahadev to Narahari was naturally more personal. He wrote :

"If you were with me, thinking of you as an elder brother I would have laid my head in your lap, and lightened the burden of my heart by weeping it out. But let that be. You need

not come now simply for this. Rain has not yet started here, but it is bound to come within a day or two. I shall start for the Ashram on the 15th or 16th. I shall write to you in advance. Will you kindly meet me at Surat if possible? Please do not worry even if you do not hear from me. But under no circumstances should you come to the Ashram only to meet me. . . . Durga will have to stay here upto Diwali. When I return after the monsoon, I may fetch her back. You should go and see Ichhaben if you find time after the rainy season. She often inquired after you. Thanks to my father's personality, she too has developed a character which is better than that of the average stepmother."⁴

Narahari went to Dihon from Sarbhan immediately on receiving the news of Haribhai's death in spite of Mahadev's request to him to refrain from doing so.

Mahadev pondered over the rites after death in memory of his father :

"After death there are gruesome rites to be performed in our community. Ichha understood the wicked ideas involved. Both Chhotubhai and Bhikhabhai, my cousins, agreed with me and it was decided not to feed any relative or any *brahmin*. I will perform the religious rites, for I do not understand them. And I cannot throw away as hearsay something which I do not understand. But no *brahmuns* were to be fed after the religious rites. The *brahmuns* may take uncooked provisions at home and cook them. Others have not liked this, but when I have the opportunity of practising my belief for the first time, how can I falter from my course !"⁵

Mahadev did not stop with the negative step of not feeding the *brahmuns*. He also thought of some memorial to bolster his new method. He wrote to Narahari in the letter of 6th July :

"I shall receive a thousand rupees for my translation of *On Compromise*. I have decided to set aside half the amount for four scholarships of rupees hundred and twenty-five each, in memory of my father. Four boys or girls can learn the art of cloth-making within six months with this amount, staying in the Ashram."⁶

Haribhai's death ended a chapter in Mahadev's life. His mother had died when he was only seven years old. Haribhai alone had to undertake the responsibility of both mother and father in his life. Haribhai did remarry two or three years later according to the custom prevailing in those days. But as Ichhaben was very young, all decisions had to be taken by Haribhai. He decided to bring up his beloved Mahadev by keeping him by his side. As a teacher in a

Primary School, Haribhai was frequently transferred. He himself supervised Mahadev's primary education. This was a very fortunate decision for Mahadev for he would find no one to supervise his development more able than his father. Haribhai had the combination of affection and discipline as well as culture and generosity. He had the determination to face difficult financial situations, and yet had the capability of creating circumstances to enable his son to get the best education. He was an excellent teacher. Dahyabhai Nayak, a life-long worker amongst the Bhils of Panchmahals came from Bhandut near Dihen. He had studied under Haribhai for some years in his childhood. He never forgot to gratefully remember the culture he imbibed with his education from Haribhai, even when he himself was in the nineties.

Our mythology gives two examples of fathers who doted on their sons. Dhritarashtra and Dasharatha. Dhritarashtra's love for his son was such that it stopped him from doing his duty in spite of his being aware of it. Dasharatha's love for his son led him to an agonising death on account of being separated from his son, but did not deter him from his given word. Dhritarashtra represented the easy way, Dasharatha, the beneficial way. Haribhai's love for his son was like that of Dasharatha. He took up the responsibility of the family and let Mahadev struggle for months in his legal practice. Haribhai was a little sad when Mahadev joined Gandhiji, but he did not stop him. He was badly hurt at Mahadev's imprisonment but did not utter a word about it. His one wish was that Mahadev should go and stay with him for a long period. But even in his last letter he restrained his son from hastening on to go to him and asked only for some books from the Navajivan publications.

It can be said that Haribhai was satisfied by the path of service chosen by his son. He had voiced his satisfaction in a short conversation with Gandhiji at Navsari Station whilst going to Bombay from Vasad. Haribhai saw that one and all in the Ashram loved and respected his son, when Mahadev's illness took him there for a long stay. Mahadev was being nursed in the Ashram as he would never have been nursed anywhere else. Haribhai read *Navajivan* regularly. Mahadev wrote in a letter to Narayan after his father's death, "There is no one left now, who would read my worthless articles in the *Navajivan* with as much affection as he did. An article bearing my name was for him a rare treasure." His main concern was Mahadev's delicate health and as to how he would put up with a hard life.

Mahadev too was constantly worried. He felt that Haribhai's health was delicate and that he could not look after him as he ought to. He felt guilty that Haribhai had to shoulder the responsibilities of

the family in spite of having him for a son. Mahadev had eased Ichhaben's burden in the later years by bringing up Shanta and Nirmala, as well as Shanta's daughter Sushila as if they were his own daughters. The youngest, Paramanand, studied in Dihen, Surat and Bombay. He often used to come and spend his holidays with his elder brother. Mahadev's love for his family was in no way diminished by his staying away from them. He became the head of the family after his father's death; although as the main member of the family, it was Ichhaben who took all decisions, albeit never without taking Mahadev's opinion about them.

In the last letter he (Haribhai) said, " . . . that he felt that the nervous attack might deprive him of his life " He had also added, "If it did not he would go to Ahmedabad."⁸

Haribhai felt content at the state of Mahadev's health during their last meeting. He said, "This time I find that your chest has developed well. This is the result of regular life. You must not put on chappals. You should wear closed slippers to save your heels from cracking." Referring to this sentence Mahadev wrote to Narahari, "He had not outgrown his concept of me as a child "

Could anyone go and ask Tulsidas whether Dasharatha could ever forget that Rama was a child ?

FOOTNOTES

1. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, p. 67
2. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharit*, p. 98 (Guj)
3. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. I, p. 364
4. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, pp. 67-68
5. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharit*, p. 99
6. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, p. 68
7. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadevbhai-nun-Poorvacharit*, pp. 97-98
8. *Ibid.*, p. 97

CHAPTER XXIII

DELIGHTFUL IS THIS MOMENT

"You crafty fellow ! Why did you people send us away a few hours earlier ? You ought to be slapped ! But what can I do ? Get a slap from our Pyara (Pyarelal) !"

This is the beginning of a letter written by one non-violent man to another non violent one. It was written by Gandhiji's secretary to Gandhiji's youngest son. The letter-writer had forgotten in his enthusiasm to write the date. However, the reference was very clear; the letter had been written immediately on receipt of the news of Gandhiji's release from prison. A few hours previously Mahadev had been to see Gandhiji as a prisoner on his sick bed. There was no indication at the time of his being released from jail. And so he had gone back to Ahmedabad from Poona to shoulder the responsibility of *Navajivan* when he got the glad news. Mad with joy, Mahadev missed the fact that Devdas was not responsible for Gandhiji's incarceration or release. If he could have helped he would have embraced and kissed Devdas, but as several miles divided them, he embraced him through a letter.

Since the receipt of the telegram announcing Gandhiji's release — though physically Mahadev was on the banks of the Sabarmati, emotionally he had already reached Bapu's bedside on the confluence of Mula-Mutha.

Bapu was now free, not because the movement had gained strength, but because he was unwell, and it was for this very freedom that Mahadev had tried for the last one year to strengthen the movement, touring the entire country day and night. Of course, the release was unconditional, Bapu would not have accepted it had it been otherwise, but the worry about his health was as intense as the joy for his release. Mahadev was doubly worried as he was far away. During the recruitment campaign in Kheda, when Gandhiji fell seriously ill, Mahadev was there to nurse him night and day. One night when the condition was serious, Mahadev had sat beside

Bapu's bed for the whole night and prayed, 'Oh God ! Please take away half of my life, but do save him.' In the early morning he dozed a bit, when he suddenly woke up by some sound and found the doctor examining him. Mahadev eagerly looked at the doctor, awaiting his verdict ! And it was as if God spoke through the doctor saying, 'The danger has passed off.' The danger had passed and Bapu was saved — since then for the rest of his life Mahadev believed that 'I have given half of my life to Bapu and so I would not live long.' But this was an episode two years old. At that particular time the worry was how to look after Bapu. And so after joking in the letter to Devdas, he wrote in all seriousness in the second paragraph :

"Now the responsibility of looking after Bapu has shifted on to us from that of the Government. Bapu is free, but so is the Government. Our lives would mean something only if we could make Bapu live for a long time."²

Mahadev waited intently for the most detailed news about Bapu, for his every sentence and every word. He came to recognise the foot steps of the postman who came daily with bags of mail. The value of the mail had become equal to gold, overnight.

Mahadev gave orders to Devdas, one after the other :

"It would be better if you do not wander about, leaving Bapu — do not misinterpret the words wander about, because I know all your 24 hours are accounted for. But for every issue of *Navajivan* and *Young India* we must get at least a few sentences, only spoken, if not dictated by him. And it would be enough if only that matter appeared on the first page of *Navajivan* and *Young India*.

"I also hope for something else from you — every Wednesday you must post a detailed letter about Bapu's health till he is there."³

After worrying about Bapu's health, Mahadev remembered Bapu's *Navajivan* and *Young India*. Then he found time to describe the delight and joy felt at the Ashram !

"Here today the joy is boundless. I had to give a lecture on 'Bapu's Philosophy' at Gujarat College, but the lecture was cancelled.' The boys took out a procession and moved about the whole town. There were about fifty to sixty cyclists among the boys. The whole procession was chanting '*Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram*' and the cyclists were marking time with the cycle bells. Lumps of sugar were being distributed at various places in the city. *Laddus* were being distributed amongst the poor. People who played various instruments in a band came without being called and led the procession. There was a

display of lights in the city at night and preparations for a warm welcome for Bapu were to be under way. The students of the Vidyalaya took care to see that there was not a single person without khadi on that day. I have sent you two telegrams to-day. Please act upon the messages. If Bapu's message, even a couple of lines, was sent for *Young India*, that could be given on the first page and I need not write some trash."⁴

After this Mahadev wrote some news to be conveyed to Gandhiji which would help his recovery.

"Dr. Roy has given his assets of Rs 50,000/- for khadi work. Have you informed Bapu about it? If you have not done so please do it. Many boys of our Vidyalaya regularly spin after carding the cotton grown on Vidyalaya grounds. There are always ten to twelve boys in the spinning class from morning till evening - sons of mill-owners are amongst those who spin a specially fine thread! Professor Kripalani's charm is indeed remarkable!"⁵

And lastly Devdas's friendship made Mahadev a bit mischievous in spite of his natural modesty.

"Your work must have increased a lot! And I am adding to it. Please forgive me. How nice it would have been had I been there! What happened at the hospital after the news of the release? - Only you can tell me what Bapu said. If you do not tell me I will call you hard-hearted or wicked or I do not know what else! I would definitely call you stupid. I don't know whether you would have time to read this letter or not. But if you have time to go to the toilet, read it there.

Your brother, Mahadev."

"P.S. 'Your brother' is with you. I have received a letter to-day with the address 'Mahadevdas Mohandas Gandhi', written on it."⁶

Mahadev did not forget his journalism in midst of bouts of joy. And so he gave more than half the page in the letter written to Devdas, to *Navajivan* and *Young India*. He wanted news, immediately. He wanted authoritative material which could be printed on the first page. He wanted matter that no one else had.

Gandhiji's release from prison was news of the highest importance of that period. Mahadev had waved it with all the finesse that Tensing Norgay or Edmund Hillary had used when they flew the Tri-colour on the Everest. This ardent feeling continued in many issues of *Navajivan*.

Mahadev and Gandhiji had developed a bond which made separation very difficult for both of them. As far back as 1921

Gandhiji had written to Mahadev who was then working for *The Independent*.

"I am tempted with the thought that if a person like you is with me, he can take over my work. . . . It would be right that you join me as soon as you are free from there. . . ."

Mahadev as well had written as soon as he was released from jail :

"I have lost my vitality with Gandhiji's imprisonment, my articles have lost their liveliness. The readers also must have experienced pain as I have done whilst writing my lifeless articles, and they must have had sympathy for me and not dislike, because my pain is their pain. The remedy for that pain is in God's hands. . . ."

Mahadev's emotions regarding his release when Gandhiji was in jail were repeatedly expressed in his articles :

"I am feeling confused on being released from jail, because one whom I considered to be my life and soul is in the prison. To live without him means living in utter darkness."

Late Shri Jugatram's lines in his devotional song aptly apply to Mohan and Mahadev's condition :

Two Hearts full of love,
Jump on either side,
Attracted, but deprived of touch,
Restless mind every moment,
Oh ! This unseen curtain of distance !

The rebuke by Mahadev of 'sent us away a few hours early' in his letter to Devdas was with reference to the announcement of Gandhiji's unconditional release a few hours after Mahadev returned from an interview with him in Sassoon Hospital after his appendicitis operation.

The description of that interview and of the things he saw in those days, had been lovingly given in the columns of *Navajivan* and on many pages of *Mahadevbhai-ni-Diary* !

From Poona Gandhiji came to Bombay and stayed at Juhu. He started his normal activities only after his health improved considerably. Mahadev had dealt with this period of the love affair through the issues of *Navajivan*.

Even when he was taken to the hospital from the prison, Gandhiji was given permission to call his own doctor and some close friends or family. He gave two names, Dr. Dalal of Bombay and Dr. Jivraj Mehta from Baroda, but as there would have been a delay in their reaching Poona, Gandhiji had agreed to be operated by Dr. Maddock, the prison doctor and had signed to say that he had full confidence in the doctor. As his dear ones, he gave the names of

Shastriar and Nrisimha Chintamani Kelkar, both of whom held divergent political views from him. The third person was Dr. Phatak who was interested in khadi work. All three were surprised to have been called by Gandhiji at the time of his operation. Kelkar had declared his opposition to Gandhiji in many of his articles. In a later article, he wrote that he was impressed by the fact that Gandhiji considered him a friend and had called him to be by his side during an emergency. Dr. Phatak initially refused to believe that Gandhiji would remember an ordinary worker like himself. But he felt elated and blessed when he was convinced that it was true. Gandhiji wanted to select a Harijan as his fourth choice but he could not think of any Harijan friend nearby.

On 18th January 1924 Vallabhbhai, having achieved a speedy victory in Borsad Satyagraha, met bed-ridden Gandhiji along with Mahadev in the Sasoon Hospital at Poona, where Gandhiji had visiting time at the Hospital after four in the evening. If Gandhiji had so desired he could have asked any two members of his family to come and visit him at any time during the day, but he did not ask for any special treatment.

Bapu welcomed Vallabhbhai from the bed saying, 'Hail, O King of Borsad !' As soon as Gandhiji had come to the upper floor of the Hospital from the Operation Theatre, he had almost become the king of Sasoon Hospital. By his charm and humour he had won the hearts of doctors, nurses, ward-boys and visitors alike. After giving the new title to Vallabhbhai he laughed heartily, though that did cause a little pain. Then he related the whole story. Gandhiji guessed that Vallabhbhai and Mahadev must have heard the whole story of his rest from people around him, but how could he give up the pleasure of describing the whole thing to his own people ?

He began praising the doctors. Both doctors were servants of the same British Government which had sentenced him to six years' imprisonment, both were whites, he knew neither of them previously. But the worshipper of non-violence was considering them only as human beings, rising above all considerations of the differences of country and colour. Moreover, both were expert doctors who had saved him at a critical time. Nothing could be wanting in his praise of them ! He said about Col. Murray, Superintendent of Yeravda Jail :

"He is very competent, besides being an I.M.S. he is an M.D., has taken some other medical degrees and had served at Port Blair. He has a great regard for me. He would always tell me, 'I don't like all these new experiments on your body. You should follow my advice about your food.'"¹⁰

Murray examined the abdomen thoroughly. Repeatedly the pressure of his hand would come near the appendix and I would say, 'I feel the pain there.' That made him suspicious. But the pain subsided a little and again on the 12th there was a recurrence. So he called Col Maddock, Civil Surgeon, Sassoon Hospital, Poona, and told him, 'It is appendicitis.' But Col Maddock did not agree. He said the pain might be due to the aggravation of chronic dysentery. When on the next day, the pain grew unbearable, Col. Maddock came again and they decided that I should be taken out of the prison. Col Maddock brought me in his own car immediately. There was no arrangement at the hospital for me at the time. After making the arrangement, the people Gandhiji had suggested were called."¹¹

The country came to know the details about Gandhiji's health from a statement released by Shastriar. Gandhiji said through him.

"... he said that he had full confidence in the medical men about him and that they had been very kind and very careful. Should there arise any public agitation, he added, then it should be made known that he had no complaint whatever to make against the authorities. So far as the care of his body went, their treatment left nothing to be desired."¹²

Then Gandhiji gave his view of the reason for the illness.

"The more I reflect, the more I feel that my self-restraint is still raw. In Africa, I had given away my body at the disposal of the jail officers completely. Here I fell ill thrice. I always believed that I was successfully walking on the edge of a sword, but that edge must have been blunt. However high the degree of self-restraint in a man, if once there is a lapse, he is doomed. A time was when I had thought myself beyond the clutches of any disease, but now I see that despite so much of self-restraint I fell ill thrice."

Looking at Mahadev Gandhiji said, "You had to meet with many a disappointment. You couldn't see me at all! Doesn't matter. It is good for you and good for our work. Since I called you at 4 p.m. sharp, I shall be able to tell everybody, 'I refused to see Vallabhbhai and Mahadev earlier and you also may not come before time.' I have heard about you. You are doing exactly what Vallabhbhai asks you to do with the fidelity of Yudhishtira's dog. If he points you out the sun at the dead of night, you say, 'Yes, I see it,' and if he shows stars by daytime, you say, 'I see them.' I was very glad to know it. That is how any work could be done."¹³ Then he inquired after Durga and Narahari. He repeatedly praised the work accomplished at Borsad.

On the next day Mahadev complained when he met Bapu. "Bapu, you had not grown so weak in your last illness." "May be,"

he replied, "there was no other physical hardship, but the authorities left nothing undone in giving me mental pain."¹⁴

Gandhi inquired after many of his co-workers. He inquired about *Maharashtra Dharma* edited by Vinoba. He could not contain himself praising the articles of Upanishad printed in that. Talking about his Urdu lessons in the jail he said, "You may tell the Mussalmans that their fear of my coming out as a Maulvi is going to come true."

He asked for the names of the members of the Congress Working Committee. Referring to the votes each of them had secured, he said, "It was good that Deshabandhu Das was elected and it was also good that he got so few votes."¹⁵

During this period Deshabandhu had made some impolite observations about non-co-operation and Gandhi. Had Gandhi failed to welcome him, his non-violence would have received a jolt and the opinion Gandhi gave about the lesser number of votes indicated that his non violence did not originate from credulity.

Gandhi welcomed Lala Lajpatrai as the 'Lion of the Punjab'. Lalaji said to him, "What shall I say? Come out quickly. We are building upon the hope of your coming out and leading us once again. We have been like children without a master in your absence. We have been little babies fighting amongst one another." Bapu put his hand on his stomach and said, "I feel like laughing heartily, but my stomach does not permit it. It is my supreme conviction that I am serving the Country in jail equally well, if not more than I used to do outside."¹⁶

After four days, Col Murray, Superintendent of Bapu's jail, came to see him. Mahadev also was astonished at his humility and tenderness. Shaking hands with Bapu, he said, "Do you think, Mr. Gandhi, I have neglected you? I did want to come. But I thought I need not disturb you in your rest. Now that I am seeing you after some days, you are looking very much better." Bapu said, "I am sorry, some vicious attacks have been made on you in the Press." The Colonel laughed and said, "Please don't worry. They have not been made by those who know me." Bapu inquired after his jail comrades. He said, "Everyone remembers you. Your colleague, Mr. Gani, has sent you word that he has been regularly observing your rule of getting up at 4 a.m. Indulal and others are all O.K. They all miss you very much and — (with a smile) I hope they will miss you permanently." Bapu smiled and said, "Nothing will please me better, Col Murray, than to be up and doing again under your kind care." The Colonel blushed. "Don't say that, Mr. Gandhi. Be all right soon and let me know if I can be of any service to you," he said, as he

bid good bye. Bapu then remarked, "See, his very face reveals the man. What frankness and goodness!"

Mahadev's brief remark "Col Murray gave me an idea of the deep love with which the atmosphere in Bapu's small jail room must have been filled and I felt pity for the stupidity of that Government which is trying to confine the light of that love within the four walls of a prison room."¹⁷

Many people came to see Gandhiji. Mahadev took down notes of Gandhiji's talks with as many visitors as it was possible and presented them to the people through the periodicals. His constant effort through every interview was to make the people understand Gandhiji's thoughts, to let them clearly see his probity, and to spread his own love for Gandhiji all over the world. In this writing there was devotion, but no exaggeration; there was love, but no flattery; there was an effort to unfold Gandhiji's virtues, but none to hide his shortcomings. He hesitated to refer to any mention about himself during Gandhiji's conversation with others. For instance, once Gandhiji said to Devdas, "As for Mahadev, he is, from his very birth, too gentle to hurt a fly."¹⁸ Once when the talk seemed to be prolonged, Mahadev asked him to end it, and Bapu said .

"I had done much talking today about this and that, but I was not really interested. It is a joy to talk with you. And what else can I wish for but a receptive soul like yourself? I would feel satisfied if I could properly expound my thoughts to a few young men like you and if they began to think along that line."¹⁹

The most serious political questions about the country found expression in Mahadev's writings and there were questions regarding the daily life at the Ashram. Varied types of subjects affecting life were contained therein describing people's different natures. There were funny incidents which reduced one to uproarious laughter, while there were emotional episodes which were likely to draw a tear.

"After his meals at night, some nurses came to talk and joke with him. Bapu asked one of them, 'Do you sing?' She said, 'I used to, but I can't today.' Bapu then told them, 'Get away. You are no good as nurses. One of the essential qualifications of a nurse is her ability to sing. The first nurse whom, happily, I came in contact with was an excellent singer. She was not a professional nurse. That nurse was Olive, Mr. Doke's daughter.' Mr. Doke had looked after Gandhiji in South Africa when he was once assaulted. 'I had got a wound and the pain was unbearable. I asked Olive to sing, "Lead Kindly Light!" She sang it in such a soulful manner, that the music is still ringing in my ears. My pain disappeared all at once.' "²⁰

Mahadev in reference to the joy of experiencing the atmosphere of love and light emanating from Gandhiji's presence said -

"It had yet to see his gospel go forth from his sickbed and see it translated into act before his eyes. It is a living atmosphere of love of which you begin to feel the effects, as you approach the room which happens to possess today the light that transcends the bounds of time and place. That privilege is being entirely monopolized by the hospital nurses. One of them is an Englishwoman of long experience. He cannot help smiling as she quietly approaches him . . . She decorates the room with the finest flowers and asks Bapu to admire her work

"There was another nurse much younger, but equally fond of Bapu, who prided herself on having Mr. Gandhi as her first 'private' patient after passing out as a trained nurse. 'Nursing is not always a joy, at times, it is a task,' she used to say, 'but it has been a pure joy and privilege to nurse Mr. Gandhi. The doctor comes and tells me, "You did not use to print your reports like this ever before" and I tell him straightway, "Nor had I such a patient before." And another day she told me, 'My friends were chaffing me for getting fond of Mr. Gandhi, I told them they would do the same if they had the privilege of serving him.'"²¹

. . . Gandhiji's revered elder sister came from the Ashram in company with several other ladies. That scene is difficult to describe. After how many long years the sister saw her brother! She was too moved to be able to utter a word, but Gandhiji himself broke the stunning stillness: "Sorry, I am in no condition today to get up and bow down to you. I am so glad you came!" When she began to leave the room, that ever-cheering nurse asked Bapu, 'Is this your sister?' 'Yes,' said Bapu. 'And this?' 'She too,' said Bapu again. 'And these your sisters! Am I then your sister?' 'Definitely, if you like to be one.' She burst into a loud laugh. The light began to dawn on that nurse that her patient was a generous-hearted man to whom the whole world was kith and kin. The surgeons also saw what Bapu was, but when will the Government understand him?"²²

The question of communal disagreement was even then raising its head. When the leaders of both the communities met, they kept on thinking about the activities of the other community. Gandhiji's views in this matter were very different and difficult for both the parties to digest. He spoke seriously about this to Mahadev

". . . To me, for one, the very essence of Hinduism lies in self-sacrifice and non-violence. And so long as you (Hindus) do not accept this point without a shred of doubt, you are sure to

stumble again and again. But we (believers in non-violence) should leave the place where people (Hindus) are not prepared to listen to us.²³

"Just then Rajaji and Shankarlal came up. He began to tell Rajaji in English. 'I was just now telling Mahadev that the question (of Hindu-Muslim unity) is by its very nature such as does not admit of 'responsive co-operation'. All matters of love are unilateral contracts. If one of the parties fulfils all the conditions, it is sufficient. There is no spirit of bargaining. I do not love you because you agree to love me. I love you because I feel it my duty to love you. When I met Mr. Abdul Bari he put me a question as to what the Hindus would expect from the Mussalmans in return for their co-operation. I said, 'nothing'. They will do what they may feel bound in honour to do. . . . Whilst I . . . say that I do not want any return, I mean to say that I do not want any return from the Mussalmans. But I will surely have my return from God. I will die for my principle with the fullest confidence that God will repay my labours and my sacrifice.'²⁴

"I am giving this to you because I have found it by experience. My signal success in South Africa and the little wave of Hindu-Muslim unity that we did have here was due to a recognition of the principle. All the talk of getting as strong as the Mussalmans, having *akhadas* (gymnasiums) and Civil Guards is absurd. These are all make-shifts. 'Get stronger than the Mussalmans', they say. 'The Mussalmans will league with their co-religionists out of India', is the reply. 'We shall then enter into a treaty with Japan, China and other Asiatic countries.' And so on. Admit the use of force and you will make the country an armed camp in no time. If you cannot defend yourself, hire *goondas*; the next step is to seek help of the police, then the help of outside nations and so on *ad infinitum*!

"You make up your mind and determine that you will not swerve an inch from your faith. My principle is for all time. But if they do not listen to me, what is it to me? Buddha's teaching has not borne fruit. But who can say it had failed? It is but a span of 2,600 years. Christianity had practically rejected Christ's teaching. And Muslims have Mohammed's and today has become nothing but a tomfoolery of defiance. The Mussalmans have not the self-sacrifice, the simplicity, the reliance in God of Mohammed and his four successors. Nor do I think that Mohammed's message was final and for all time. It was good enough for the country and the times in which it was

delivered. But it was incomplete and adulterated. I also refuse to believe that Mohammed was the last Prophet."²⁵

The meeting with Hakimji, Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali was also as touching as that with Shaukat Ali alone. Mohammed Ali kissed Bapu's feet, but with the covering kept intact. Bapu himself was the first to greet Hakimji with joined palms and then they shook hands.

Many subjects were touched and during one of them Mohammed Ali said, "Bapu, I want your permission for one thing — not for carrying on propaganda in foreign countries, but counteracting the malicious lies spread there." Bapu said, "Who am I to give you permission? I don't want to establish Gandhiraj", etc. But Mohammed Ali persisted. So Bapu said, "You are certain to decide anything after weighing all the pros and cons and I am not going to blame you in future. My personal view, however, stands that there is no need for foreign propaganda."²⁶

In these very days Mahadev wrote articles for the readers of *Navajivan*. Some excerpts from the *Navajivan* articles of that period are given here as examples of Mahadev's ability to evoke an echo of his own innermost feelings from the readers :

"Fortune favoured with Bapu's *darshan* . . . not to the extent of being able to serve him. . . . I had seen him previously only during the riots in Bombay . . . he looked dangerously weak. To see him speaking, rather straining himself in order to let the words come out, was an alarming, painful sight. Covered as he was with a sheet all over his body, only his face peered out. The rest of the body had grown so thin that it could hardly be made out from the covering sheet. It was cruelty to make him or let him speak. But how could the tide of his love be stopped by us? Our very sight made it rush towards us and he burst out into a laugh. . . . Shall I congratulate Vallabhbhai and myself for being the recipients of that love? Not at all. Everyone can bask in the sun, as its rays fall on the earth equally in all directions and on every nook and corner of it. But I must admit, we were fortunate in having an experience of that love. . . .

"Since that day till now, I have had the piece of good fortune to be a door-keeper outside Bapu's room and I am inevitably reminded of his illness three years ago, when I used to keep a similar watch.

"And need I say anything about the torrents of love that have taken their course to Poona from all parts of India? Devdas who should be privileged to be with his father for all the time has to content himself with serving him by attending to

the numerous letters and telegrams coming day and night inquiring after Bapu's health. . . . One day, the residents of far off Tanjore write to say that they did their *archanas* (special prayers) and *abhishekas* (holy bath given to the deity) in a particular *mandir* (temple), and send on the sacred ashes and *kumkum* (vermilion) for Mahatma, another day comes a letter from Kashi (Benares) telling Devdas that special *japas* (chants) were performed in the temple of Mrityunjaya Mahadev the Conqueror of Death; an English lady writes detailed instructions about his diet; and Mrs. Gokhale from Bombay writes to say that she will spin an extra couple of hours every day, now that Mahatmajī cannot spin. One . . . is an Englishman. It is simply impossible to stop him . . . The man is deeply touched, moves out assuring us that he prays thrice everyday that Mr. Gandhi may live upto his age (82 years) Many Englishmen pray for him and many officers inquire after him

" . . . the illustrious leaders (Hakimji, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mohammed Ali) did not come until now, as they knew it would not be well to disturb him. Jawaharlal assures Devdas that he would come last of all. A man like Mr. Jaykar says, 'I will now come, but will only have his *darshan* from a distance with my friend Natarajan.' "²⁷

Mahadev had to go to Ahmedabad for *Navajivan* work. He detested the very idea of going far away from Bapu when he was sick. For a number of issues the subject of his articles was bed-ridden Bapu. He clarified the situation in an article titled "That Glorious Event" and said :

" . . . I am not yet free from the inebriation of my stay with Bapu. Once that alchemy of love begins to work, nobody has the power to release himself from it or stop its ever increasing potency . . . there was none among them whose heart did not shed tears at the sight of Bapu laid low with disease. And yet everyone believed that it was God who, under the guise of Bapu's disease, gave them the chance to have his *darshan*. It was God, everyone feels, who created this opportunity in order that all of us, who were sunk in the slough of despondency, could brace ourselves up with fresh life and vigour . . . At the sight of his inborn sweetness of temper, even in his sick-bed those of us who may have grown hard hearted must have resolved, on leaving Poona, to be soft at heart at the demonstration of his keen sense of duty in practice and precept, those of us who may have become negligent in our duties must have decided to be more devoted, and at Gandhiji's exhortation

of heart unity, those who may have grown alienated from their brothers must have determined to be reunited with them."²⁸

The accounts of the visitors who came for the interviews with Bapu gave ample scope to Mahadev's devotion-dipped pen. In these accounts through different words and through diverse emotions, we can find only the picture of a deeply devoted Mahadev. Accounts of meeting with Shaukat Ali, Rajaji and Hakim Ajmal Khan are given below :

"Everyone was wondering what would happen when Shaukat Ali visited Bapu. The story of his visit spread from one end of the hospital to the other and even patients using crutches under their armpits and those who in wheel-chairs began to rush towards the adjacent room in which we stayed till it was filled with patients. Shaukat Ali shook hands with all of them. The right to talk first of all with Bapu went naturally to Bi Amma (Shaukat Ali's mother). It was with difficulty that Shaukat Ali could restrain the upsurge of his emotions till she finished blessing Bapu. My account would be incomplete, if I simply said that Shaukat Ali then made Bapu laugh many times by recounting humorous stories of his tour-experiences, telling Bapu that he had become a Khadi 'drum' (reference to his corpulence) and making many such lively remarks. They say laughter increases the quantity of blood in our body. Taking in view the big size of Shaukat Ali's body, it was indeed in a way his duty to increase the quantity of blood in the body of his colleague, Gandhi. And he has a knack for it. He hardly lets you speak. He himself will talk away the whole time. And Bapu lay in his bed, a patient. Why should he utter a word? So this was the first day after the operation when there was nothing for Bapu to say and everything for him to laugh about. The Bara Bhai (Big Brother) can legitimately claim to have added something to the blood content of Bapu's body by making him laugh more than anybody else before him. But even a common jester can make people laugh; that is not the end of the story of Shaukat Ali's meeting with Bapu. It was Bapu who, during Lala Lajpat Rai's visit, had taken upon himself the work of bringing lightness in the atmosphere charged with dejection by Lalaji. Here it was Shaukat Ali who, after making Bapu and all others laugh heartily, made them sink into gravity. As he was leaving, he began to grope for Bapu's feet. 'Mahatmaj! You have grown so thin and weak that your feet cannot even be discerned!' And really, covered, and reduced to skin and bone, as they were, it was difficult to find out the location of his feet. When he found them, he took off all the

covering bared Bapu's feet and, with eyes dripping with love and sympathy, imprinted a kiss on them !

"Then came Rajagopalachariar, Jamnalalji, Shankarlal Banker, one after another Bapu began to inquire after Rajagopalachariar's health. The latter's frequent attacks of cough were themselves an answer to Bapu's question. Bapu then began to put more and more searching questions, as Rajagopalachariar tried to explain the attacks away. At last to turn away Bapu's thoughts Rajagopalachariar put a diverting question - 'Bapu, when are you going to increase your food ?' 'That means,' replied Bapu, 'that you want to change the trend of our talk. Quite true. It does not become the pot to call the kettle black.' 'No, no,' returned Rajagopalachariar 'But you have become half yourself ! I had hoped to find you better.' 'Admitted,' said Bapu, 'but perhaps I would have been worse than I am, while you *are* worse than you should be.'

"The man who thus silenced Rajagopalachariar's tongue behaved quite differently with Hakimji. The latter came with Mohammed Ali and the Big Brother also seized the chance to join them. Hakimji himself had grown very weak. Bapu inquired after his health. Hakimji remarked, 'Your suffering must have been terrible.' Bapu 'Yes, it's best left unsaid.' 'Could you find out the reason ?' Hakimji pursued 'I must have committed a serious crime against God. He is punishing me for it,' said Bapu. Mohammed Ali, who was sitting still and silent, became more so and began to wipe off his tears. Everyone sank into a gloomy silence at the reply and put himself a question somewhat like this 'If God punishes so severely even that man whom all consider to be free from blemish, if even such a man stumbles into sin, how difficult the matter is for ordinary humans ?' Some other topics were also touched, but the same heavy air hung around them. As he was departing Shaukat Ali said, 'Maharaj, have plenty of food now. We will manage to do without you somehow, but you must first of all regain your health. You are taking very little food. Please have more of it.' Bapu 'Yes, I will. But if I grow big, how will you be able to carry me in your pocket ?' Mohammed Ali added, 'Bapu, why not ask Colonel Maddock to take off some slices from Shaukat and graft them on to you ?' Bapu laughed and said, 'Excellent ! But would not the very sight of Shaukat cause him to tremble ?'

"Bapu is thus relieving everybody's anxiety for him by making them laugh. But it will yet take much time for us to laugh with him for his complete recovery. Bapu is still actually

bed-ridden. The wound is much healed but not closed up completely. It is still half an inch deep. That part on which there were stitches is healed up, but the doctor will not allow Bapu to get up, till the wound is fully healed."²⁹

Even after writing continuously for three issues of *Navajivan* about Gandhiji's sickness and the days he passed in the hospital, Mahadev neither exhausted the material on the subject, nor did he get bored. He says :

"If it can be pardoned to compare a lamp with the sun, I may say that I would be tired of writing about Bapu or worried whether readers would enjoy my article, if I can think Tulsidas getting tired writing the Ramayana or worrying whether anybody would care to read it."³⁰

Being a devotee himself, he anticipated and read the same feelings in others. The description of an interview with a landlord from Madras was evidence of this :

"He came to see Bapu one morning before proceeding to Delhi. He is a very young man with a heart of gold. As he is short of hearing, Bapu said loudly, 'Please forgive me. I cannot speak so loudly.' The poor man stood stock still. Then he began to stroke Bapu's body and gently massaged his feet. His face seemed to say but one thing, 'How reduced your body is !' But he could not stand for long near Bapu even in that state. He moved away and stood at a distance. Despite his brave effort his eyes refused to obey him. He began to search his pocket for a handkerchief and, as he could not get one, he wiped his eyes with a sleeve of his coat ! In order to distract his mind, somebody asked him 'When are you going to Delhi ?' With sorrow pictured on his face, he said, 'What is there to be done in Delhi that I might be eager to go there ?' Then again he fell into a moody silence for a while and said, 'I will come again this evening with my mother,' he went away. When he returned he was in a hurry to leave for Delhi and had just peeped in to bid Gandhiji good bye and let his mother meet him. As he came out of the room, his voice was as choked with emotion as in the morning and he departed with the words, 'If Bapu is released, I will follow in his footsteps.'³¹

To restrain the people who desired to meet Gandhiji so that he would not become over-tired was really difficult. Mahadev had been doing this all his life, but that task became even more difficult at a time of sickness. He saved himself from creating new enemies daily in spite of performing this 'stiff' duty only because of his natural modesty. Here are Mahadev's own comments on his job as a door-keeper at Poona :

"... the gate-keepers have to face a very difficult situation. While a good humoured gate-keeper sends back the *darshan premi* with soft and pleasing words, another like that old English nurse repulses them with a convincing slap. But sometimes one has to enter into deep waters in one's attempt to drive out the visitor with gentle persuasion. One or two of them were told, 'How can a meeting with you be a pleasure to Gandhiji, when you don't wear even Khadi?' These words were uttered in the most polite manner, but back came the retort, 'Does Mr Shastri wear Khadi?' The counter-question puzzled me for a while. Then I said, 'Mr. Shastri never needed my approval for his visit. It was Gandhiji himself who wanted to see Mr Shastri. I would definitely let you in if Gandhiji wanted to see you.' One of them then made another point 'I at least have worn Khadi. Why don't you let me in?' Arguments which would highly interest a logician were thus being bandied back and forth, when there came a reproach from another quarter, 'It is you alone who come in the way. Mahatmaji himself is so kind that he would let everyone see him.' 'True,' I had to answer him back, "were I as compassionate as he, I too would have been a Mahatma and you would have felt gratified at only my *darshan*. But there is only one Mahatma and that is Gandhiji. I am but a door-keeper.'"³²

Mahadev always made a note of letters not only written by Gandhiji, but also of those that were written to him. Mahadev had recorded during his visit to Gandhiji at Bombay, a letter displaying an example of the people's faith and devotion.

"I enclose herewith a hundred rupee note in pursuance of the desire of my deceased daughter Saraladevi who died on the 6th instant at the tender age of 16. The news of release just before her death had delighted her immensely. Before she, poor dear, went to Simla in April last year, her health was tolerably good. She used to go out for a walk with me, was always very cheerful and walked briskly. She was gifted with a keen intelligence and knew her duty quite clearly towards her family and her beloved country. She took a vow to wear nothing but Khadi in August 1921 and had kept at that time her mother and her elder sister as witnesses to the solemn oath. Her mother was at first, opposed to the vow, because she feared that if a young girl like her took it, she might not be able to keep it after she got married. But Sarala laughed out the fear. Unfortunately, the elder sister died on 30th July 1922 and Sarala also, poor dear girl, became an invalid on 17th August last. We had already lost two sons in their blooming youth as well as the eldest

daughter and the events had already lacerated my wife's heart. On top of them came this fresh calamity of the younger girl's illness. But on her death-bed the girl said to her mother, 'What a happy thing it was that my vow could be kept up to the last ! And now give my clothes to some helpless and indigent girls ' Then turning to me, with a voice broken with emotion she asked me to send Rs 100/- to you for the Swaraj Fund. The darling used to cherish a burning aspiration that her motherland might regain her freedom and her pristine glory. May God fulfil the desire !"³³

Mahadev used to look after *Navajivan's* work at Ahmedabad but his heart was naturally with Gandhiji at Poona or Bombay. Moreover, his journalistic mind indicated that the minutest details regarding Gandhiji should be placed before the readers. Especially if some known individual met Gandhiji and if Mahadev was unable to give the news in time in the *Navajivan* columns, he used to feel unhappy just like a careful editor of a daily. Mahadev tried to get the news about Gandhiji through letters from Devdas, Pyarelal, or from anyone who was there. Also if any personality came to Ahmedabad after meeting Gandhiji, Mahadev interviewed him and reported his comments to *Navajivan* readers. But Gandhiji's health got the top priority. Gandhiji was released on the very morning when a resolution for his release was going to be placed on the table of the Bombay Legislative Assembly. We saw at the beginning of this chapter, Mahadev's reaction to the news. In his next letter to Devdas on February 1924 he wrote . "Most probably, I will be writing you daily. Today I have sent Rs 500/- by telegraphic money order — because now we would have to bear all the expenses including that of the nurses. So, I thought, you would immediately need some money, and hence I thought it proper to send it by TMO. Do not tell Bapu about this. I always have some money lying with me. Write to me if you want more."

He feared that Bapu would not agree to keep a nurse if he knew about the expense and so Mahadev wanted the money to be stealthily used. Then came the worry about Bapu's health with regard to work. He wrote :

"I saw the *Bombay Chronicle* and read about Mohammed Ali's suggestion to Bapu to go to Ajmer. Since then I am anxious. What are these people going to do ? It is difficult to save Bapu from the trouble created by these people. For the time being that job is yours and Pyarelal's. There should be a lot of publicity about it in the newspapers. *Chronicle's* article 'Six Gandhi Months' could be considered really good from this point of view. But can Bapu not be requested in the matter ?

Bapu himself should restrict his hours of meeting people, and stop the interview after meeting a given number of people. For six months he should only go to a place where he wants to, for rest and peace. And he should agree to travel by a special train from Poona to wherever he wants to go. How do you like these suggestions? The thought that is constant is that now we are responsible for him and are tied down, and the Government is free. Now news from this side :³⁴

"I met Andrews. He gave a tangible picture of Bapu's release. He is coming to the Ashram to-day. I addressed the Gujarat Vidyapith boys today for two hours. It was just like the address I gave on Bapu's birthday, but very much longer and yet the boys asked me to go on speaking for the whole day. I was tired and so I refused. And so Professor Kripalani gave the boys a holiday in spite of the fact that he had given them a holiday yesterday, saying, 'Why do you want to hear speeches after having heard so much?' "³⁴

All letters have not been written so steadily. At times the eagerness for news about Bapu agitated Mahadev. Sometimes, after expressing this eagerness, second thoughts prevailed.

"Your letters have been intently awaited daily. And you can imagine what I must have undergone when I failed to do so. I do not believe that you would not write even if you have time, but I am sure you could understand my impatience as well. You gave me a shock by sending a thick envelope with useless letters of people, fit to be destroyed. Pyarelal wrote to me saying 'you are writing an odyssey for me or it is taking shape in your mind'. And then it did not come. Vallabhbhai daily asks me - 'Has anything come from Deva (Devdas)?' Now I am going to give him one reply, 'Do not be impatient', or 'If you want to be impatient, let me go to Poona. I shall daily write from there.' "³⁵

And in the letter written on the pad of Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, the same indecision and eagerness is evident, whether to go to Bapu or stay for *Navajivan*.

"9-3-24

"Dear Devdas,

"Whenever we are annoyed with each other, you always win in getting calmed down. This time I have won. I have written four letters after irritating you, but you have not written a single one. It will be enough for me if you send me a post card with the words, 'I am not angry.' My momentary anger has given me a manifold result. Your letter would add to it.

"Today there is a letter from Rajaji. At the end he writes, 'I wish you were here and helped in the talks or at least you were present. But what is the good of the request? The assumption is that you are indispensable at Ahmedabad whereas you would have had your full value and work by Bapu.'

"I also wonder, what is the use of writing this when nothing can be done.

"Won't you send a telegram when you leave Poona if you still have not left it? Use a code if you want to. Our code would only be, 'Bapu all right?' How can any information spread then? But it would be convenient for us, dear chap, if we knew about it! Enough for to-day. My respects to revered Ba.

Lovingly yours,
Mahadev³⁶

When Bapu felt a bit better and said that he would take over the editorship of *Young India* and *Navajivan*, Mahadev's happiness was no less than that felt by Bharat and Shatrughna when Rama took over the kingdom after his return from Lanka. Bidding farewell as the editor of *Navajivan* Mahadev wrote joyfully :

"An attempt has been made to give some pen-portraits of Gandhiji's life in hospital in the previous issues. After his release I saw him in Poona only once and that too for only two hours. Since then I saw him in Juhu only now. The first and the most delightful news I got was the fact that he had resolved to take in his own hands the charge of both, *Young India* and *Navajivan* from the next week. 'You ask me to put your name as the editor,' I said, 'Does it mean you will resume the sole responsibility of the papers or write, as one editor, on the most important matters only?' 'No,' he replied, 'Put my single name as the editor. It is impossible for me to sit still any longer. New and newer questions go on cropping up and they will continue to do so. I cannot afford any delay now. But that work (editorial) is not difficult, if only the people give me sufficient quiet.' Thinking of the thousands and thousands who have been feeling helpless and at sea and longing for Gandhiji's guidance, and of my personal relief, I felt happy at the news. When Gandhiji went to jail, 23,142 and 21,500 persons used to buy *Navajivan* and *Young India* respectively, but of them 15,955 of the first and 18,500 of the second category felt tired at last and have cut off their connection with the papers. The thought that they too will now have the chance to revive their contact pleased me but what delighted me most was the feeling that now at last it will be possible for me to quietly get out of the

unnatural position I had presumed to take for myself. None but the man in-charge knows how in conducting a paper one has to commit conscious and unconscious breaches of truth and non-violence. I am, therefore, as pleased now as I was when I was being taken to jail in Allahabad. But the thought of Gandhiji makes me tremble. I hope the people will respond in letter and spirit to the appeal Gandhiji has issued to them and will leave him in sufficient peace to enable him to conduct the weeklies. It is usually a painful affair — this one of giving or taking a farewell — but the circumstances under which I depart are so pleasant that my readers are as happy in bidding me adieu as I am in taking it. Let us thank God that, that moment comes so soon !³⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Nehru Museum, Delhi, Hand-written letter. There is no date.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. *M. D.'s Diary* - 18, Preface, p. 6
8. Ibid. - 17, p.7
9. Ibid. p. 21
10. M. D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", III, p. 299
11. Ibid. pp.300-301
12. Ibid. pp.351-52
13. Ibid. pp.302-03
14. Ibid. p. 303
15. Ibid. p.304
16. Ibid. p.305
17. Ibid. p.306
18. Ibid. p.307
19. Ibid. p.320
20. Ibid. pp.308-309
21. Ibid. - IV, p. 30
22. Ibid. p.35
23. Ibid. pp.18-19
24. Ibid. p.19
25. Ibid. pp.20-21
26. Ibid. p. 21
27. Ibid. pp.28 to 34 (selected)
28. Ibid. pp.34-35
29. Ibid. pp.36 to 39
30. Ibid. p.46

31. Ibid. pp.47-48
32. Ibid. pp.49-50
33. Ibid. pp.64-65
34. From the "Devdas Gandhi Papers" of Nehru Museum (No. 8284)
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi" - IV, pp.70-71

CHAPTER XXIV

PENANCE FOR UNITY

1924 was a relatively easy year for Mahadev in terms of individual responsibility. Gandhiji had taken up the editorship of *Young India* and *Navajivan* on his release from prison. This left Mahadev free to dedicate himself to the work, that he enjoyed most — serving Gandhiji as his “*Pir, babarchi, bhisti, khar* all in one”. His role became once again that of Hanuman instead of Bharat or Shatrughna. Central to that role was to become Gandhiji’s ‘second heart’.

For Gandhiji, the year could be described as a time sacrificed for the cause of unity. Differences between the “Pro-changers” and the “No-changers” had reached a point where the very existence of the Congress was threatened. Hindu-Muslim riots were inflicting deep wounds on the national ethos. Easing these differences was Gandhiji’s primary concern. The No-changers had hoped that Maulana Mohammed Ali would support their side and that a decision would be taken to retain the policy of non-co-operation and to accelerate the programme of —

Boycott of foreign cloth

Use of Khadi

Removal of untouchability

Nurturing and promoting Hindu-Muslim unity.

Mohammed Ali, however, decided to keep both sides happy to sit on the fence and in this way he disappointed the No-changers. Yet they decided to abide by his orders and not to insist. Those leaders who opposed the original programme (Pro-changers) became vocal in their criticism. Chittaranjan Das once went so far as to say that the country had made a mistake in giving the leadership to Gandhiji. On the other side, the No-changers declared that anyone who talked of entering the Legislatures or practising law or going to college to teach or to learn was guilty of breaking the Resolution of

the Congress Rancour and bitterness increased in each of the camps, fuelled by these outbursts.

Gandhiji did not take long to perceive the actual situation once he was released from jail. From his sick bed, he had talked with a number of leaders and workers and had gauged in which direction the wind was blowing. He was the father of both "non-co-operation" and "constructive work" but he had no desire to see Congress divided on the issue of policies or programmes. He held discussions with the moderate leaders of the Swaraj Party, especially with Pandit Motilal Nehru and later on with Chittaranjan Das.

All along, while Gandhiji was in jail, Mahadev, Rajaji, Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal had taken the lead amongst the No-changers. They all firmly believed that Congress should not make any change in its policy of non-co-operation. Mahadev was of the opinion that if they wanted to get their leader released early from his six-year term, the pressure of non-co-operation should be so intense as to leave the Government no alternative. In all other arguments, he quoted Gandhiji precisely and with authority.

The situation after Gandhiji's release was different. He had taken charge of his daily routine after resting for a couple of months. Now it was his responsibility to give personal leadership to the country, which had faltered in his absence. Mahadev could not refrain from citing an incident of this in an issue of *Navajivan* on August 10th; when Gandhiji came to Ahmedabad from Bombay, Acharya Kripalani invited him to the Gujarat College. Quoting from a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, he welcomed Gandhiji and regretted "We did not get time to spin for you, neither to discard all mill-cloth. You have astounded us by coming all of a sudden."

Gandhiji's next move was to cause even those close to him — Mahadev, Rajaji, and Vallabhbhai — to think that Gandhiji was willing to make major changes in the policies he had initiated and they had supported so as to placate the Pro-changers. Time, however, would reveal three main reasons for his actions. Firstly he saw leadership as being dynamic and therefore could see the necessity to adopt approaches according to the demands of the situation, he was more interested in discovering new paths than stagnating in old promises and adages. The second factor was Gandhiji's remarkable ability to read the situation in the country; he had, as it were, his "hand on the pulse" of India. Finally he could distinguish between the essence and the technique of the programmes by maintaining the essence but making changes in the technique.

He abandoned the programmes of collective non-co-operation, and allowed those who wanted to enter Legislatures, to practise law

or to enter schools and colleges, to do so. Putting a condition of giving 2,000 yards of self spun yarn per month for Congress membership he suggested bringing the two factions of the Congress on one platform, simultaneously with the non-co-operation and constructive work programmes.

Naturally, it became difficult for the No-changers to stomach such a major policy change. Those who considered themselves Gandhiji's representatives and whom the country considered his devoted followers, had to give up their opposition to other policies and get engrossed in constructive work. In this matter each took up an attitude according to his nature. Chakravarti Rajagopalachari gave sharp and incisive arguments to Gandhiji against these major changes of policy. It was he who had strongly supported the policy of non co operation as the Editor of *Young India* and as the leader of Tamilnadu, when Gandhiji was in jail. His arguments had been used by Mahadev in *Navajivan* and by Vallabhbhai in his speeches. So it was natural that Rajaji was shocked by Gandhiji's inclination towards the change in his non-co-operation policy. He explained to Rajaji :

" . . . How is it that you do not see the necessity as clearly as I do of the step I have taken ? I agree with you that it is better to leave the Congress if we cannot enforce our programme. The difficulty is to know how. I cannot help feeling that we cannot embarrass the Swarajists. They are supplying a felt want. They do represent a large section of people who want petty relief. Shall we obstruct them ? Ours is predominantly a spiritual activity. Its strength is developed unperceived and not by merely debating and vote taking. I am still not clearly expressing myself. I have simply set forth one argument out of many for the course I have taken and advised for adoption by us all. Somehow or other I feel the absolute correctness of the step even though I cannot demonstrate it to your satisfaction. I know how difficult it must be for you and others suddenly to accommodate yourselves to these sudden changes. But how shall I help myself ? I know I am putting an undue strain upon the loyalty and the faith of co-workers. But is it not better that I should do that rather than that I should suppress the clear voice within ? Of what use should I be, if I once stifled that guiding voice ?"

Vallabhbhai had the nature of a soldier. When Gandhiji was in jail a session of the All India Congress Committee was held in Delhi. The atmosphere created by the attitude of the representatives around Delhi was suitable to the Pro-changers. But Maulana Mohammed Ali, who had recently been released from jail and who had worked

shoulder to shoulder with Gandhiji during the Khilafat days was present there. The No-changers were hopeful of his leading the Congress their way. Rajaji decided not to attend this session. According to his biographer, Rajmohan Gandhi, it seemed as if someone had accused him of trying to take the place of power in the Congress and feeling hurt by this, Rajaji decided not to be present at Delhi.

Another No-changer leader, Jarnalal Bajaj, suggested to Mohammed Ali that instead of compromising with a hesitating mind, it would be better to accept completely the Swarajists' point of view. Bajaj was of the opinion that the co-operation of Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das should be obtained at any cost. Vallabhbhai and Rajendraprasad agreed with this view. But Mohammed Ali neither wanted a fight nor a surrender. He was thinking of a compromise wherein the Congress would declare its displeasure at the entry in the Legislatures, but at the same time, allow those who wanted to enter them. Mahadev and Devdas waited for Rajaji but when they were sure of his absence, they informed him telegraphically about Mohammed Ali's attitude of compromise. Rajaji surrendered. He sent a return telegram "IF MOHAMMED ALI WAS KEEN FOR A COMPROMISE, FRIENDS SHOULD FOLLOW HIS LEAD," he counselled and he added, "THE NATION MUST HAVE THE LESSON OF HARD EXPERIENCE."²

Vallabhbhai was completely silent in Delhi. He was asked to speak and after much persuasion he held Rajaji's telegram in his shaking hands and said in a sad voice :

"We carried on this fight until now to the limit of our strength and ability and kept the flag of non-co-operation flying. We are, however, all soldiers. There is no leader among us who has an acute brain and who thinks clearly. The message which he has sent from his sick bed has just arrived. He says, 'I advise you to place the entire responsibility on Maulana Mohammed Ali. Do not do anything that does not please him. If he is very keen upon a settlement, well, accept it. I have a feeling that the country has to pass through bitter experience. It is useless to discuss and to argue. There is no point in our preventing people from doing what they want. We have done what we could. We have lost many colleagues. We must not lose Maulana Mohammed Ali.' I accept this advice."

"I have thought a great deal and I see that I can help Maulana best by withdrawing my opposition. He says that I must consider the position of one who comes back after an absence of two years. I know that by the stand I am now taking hundreds of young men will be disappointed. I am not sure that this resolution will not deal a death-blow to non-co-operation."

To-day we look upon each other with suspicion and without love. This is an attempt to re-establish affection. It was a painful task during all this period to oppose great leaders of this country. At the same time it is equally difficult to-day to give up that opposition. Nevertheless, I request all those who are in favour of 'No change', that they should willingly accept our present position. I place the entire responsibility on Maulana Mohammed Ali, Jinnah and Gangadharrao Deshpande who have been my colleagues in opposition hold the same view as myself. If I may sum up our attitude in a sentence, we do neither support this resolution, nor oppose it."³

Having said this he left the meeting before the resolution was put to vote.

Jawaharlal used to get agitated when the decision went in favour of the Pro-changers, but he couldn't make himself lead much as his father's voice was stronger. At a time when the No-changer leaders were confused, agitated or disappointed because of Gandhiji's policy of compromise Mahadev's way was easier. His main base was that of devotion to Gandhiji, so he became neither a Pro-changer nor a No-changer but became a Co changer ! He did discuss with Gandhiji about his new premise, but in a very short time he busied himself in trying to understand its deeper meaning. Thus he was saved from agitation, confusion or disappointment. His lasting sentiment was to reduce himself almost to a zero in his devotion to Gandhiji, and so the effect of the ebb and tide of the country's politics used to affect him only to the extent that a storm affects the fish and the crocodiles in the ocean.

Gandhiji explained his own attitude, thus :

"Remember we are Satyagrahis. Let me apply to the situation the law of the family. Assume that two brothers are quarrelling over the inheritance. Both want to use it for the good of the family. One, at least, knows that he does not need it to serve the family. The majority of the clan would have him cling to the inheritance. But is it not the duty of the Satyagrahi brother to forego the inheritance and avoid a quarrel and consequent waste of time and energy ? Is the case any different here ? However, I am acting cautiously. All I am trying to do is to avoid an unseemly wrangle. I will take up the Presidentship if I find that it will serve the country. There is plenty of time to decide."⁴

However, Gandhiji compromised a lot in keeping both the No-changers and the Pro-changers in the Congress. Gandhiji used to compete in generosity with his opponents when he decided to compromise. The following are the main points of compromise

arrived at after several negotiations with Pandit Motilal and Chittaranjan Das :

1. The Congress should suspend all the boycotts except that of foreign cloth till the session of 1925;

2. The Swarajist Party should function in the Central and Provincial Assemblies on behalf of the Congress as a part of the Congress Constitution;

3. Khadi is compulsory for the members of the Committees only when they are occupied with Congress work.

4. For such members the yarn spun by others will be allowed.³

Gandhiji gave an explanation about his stand in a detailed article in *Young India*. Some important excerpts follow :

"It is possible that the reader is being disturbed by the bewildering changes he may be noticing at present in the *Young India* writings. I can assure him that they are not changes but they are a distinct advance in the direction we are going or should go. They are natural corollaries to the principles we profess. It is necessary to remember that non-violence is more important than non-co-operation and the latter without the former is a sin. . .

"The fact is, action must vary with every varying circumstance. . . .

"What must however be apparant to every one is that our differences are increasing . . . Our non-co-operation . . . has taken the form of non-co-operation in practice with one another instead of the Government. Without wishing it we are weakening one another. . . There is too much distrust in the air. . . . We must avoid this at any cost.

"I have, therefore, suggested that we should find out the lowest common measure of our programme among all the political parties and invite them all to co-operate on the Congress platform for achieving that common measure . . . without which there could be no effective political pressure. . . . But if we begin to put that programme into action before the people are ready, we shall cease to represent them. We must first come in living touch with the people by working for them in their midst. We must share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants. We must identify ourselves with the untouchables and see how we feel cleaning the toilets of the upper classes and to have the remains of their table thrown at us. . . . We must identify ourselves with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent backs and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in

which the villagers bathe, wash their clothes and pots and in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call . . . I suggest to all that they should give their mental co-operation and that they should mentally identify themselves with the masses, and as a visible and tangible token thereof, they should earnestly spin for at least thirty minutes per day in their name and for their sake. It will be a mighty prayer from the intelligentsia among the Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians and others of India, rising up to Heaven for their, that is, India's deliverance.

"My scheme is for all political parties to work unitedly for internal development. The Congress presents a suitable opportunity for a conference of all political parties and outside the Congress to frame a Swaraj scheme acceptable to all . . .

"Those who depend for national regeneration solely on the constructive programme, may be expected to lead in the matter of self-sacrifice. Not one of the things we hold dear can be achieved by trying to retain power in the Congress in opposition to Swarajists.

"Power that is sought in the name of service and can only be obtained by a majority of votes is a delusion and a snare to be avoided, specially at the present moment . . . What I have sketched above is not condition of surrender. Mine is an unconditional surrender."⁶

The compromise arrived at by Gandhiji was more or less to satisfy the Pro-changers by almost disregarding the points raised by the No-changers. The main reason for this was Gandhiji's desire to avoid at any cost a division in the Congress. Moreover, he must have had a greater confidence of being able to win over the No-changers. Initially his suggestion was that if the Swarajists entered the Legislatures, the No-changers should take the Congress Committee and Party posts. But he saw that the Swarajists were not agreeable even to this arrangement, as they felt that this suggestion was made to drive them totally away from the Congress. As soon as Gandhiji felt this resistance, he gave up his suggestion and advised the No-changers not to take any position of power and instead to get busy with constructive work. At that time the No-changers acted according to this advice to a large extent. Temple entry for Harijans as a step towards the removal of untouchability, propaganda for the wide-spread use of Khadi, efforts for Hindu Muslim unity, and Prohibition were some of the programmes taken up by persons such as Rajaji, Jammalal Bajaj, Shankarlal Banker and Jai Ramdas Doulatram. There was no question of a choice for Mahadev. His

duty had already been decided, he was with Gandhiji. And the programme Gandhiji chose in the middle of this year was Hindu Muslim unity. It can be said that this was the only programme involving a most rigorous penance in his long action-filled life. It was not only in 1924 that he had undertaken this problem nor was it going to end with that year. According to him his penance for the equality of all religions had begun right from South Africa. And his life was ultimately offered into the same sacrifice. Here an important part of that story of a long penance is presented.

The problem taken up by Gandhiji was centuries old, but the British had knotted it up to serve their interest. The question was of the co-existence of the followers of the oldest of religions with the followers of newer religions. Three divisive forces were active. The casteism of the Hindus, religious fundamentalism of the Muslims and the British Imperialism.

Historically it is significant to note that in India whenever there were people's national movements Hindu-Muslim differences became less and when the movements were withdrawn the differences again raised their heads.

It was exactly the same after the 1921 non-co-operation movement. Because of the killings at Chauri Chaura Gandhiji halted the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movement. The British played tricks to take the psychological advantage of the disappointment spread in the atmosphere because of it. On one hand they arrested Gandhiji and sentenced him to six years' imprisonment and on the other, directly or indirectly the Government encouraged communal riots when they broke out. There was an increase of goodwill between Hindus and Muslims during the days of the Khilafat movement and for some time it seemed as if this goodwill would take roots. Gandhiji and the Ali Brothers worked shoulder to shoulder for the Khilafat and Swarajya movement. But the common Hindu-Muslim programmes in the country stopped because of the arrest of the Ali Brothers and Gandhiji. Just at that time there were Hindu-Muslim riots all over the country. The whole game was like the story of the two cats and the monkey but unfortunately and unknowingly, the whole country became as helpless as the characters in that story. The British could put forth an easily available argument about handing over power without any worry if there was unity in the country. Cow-slaughter in public or playing music before a mosque could readily provoke communal riots. It became easy to highlight the differences in the Hindu-Muslim customs and incite communal feelings. For the British imperialists it was almost a child's play to keep the embers of the internal disagreements inherent in a capitalist and dependent society burning and then fan

the flames of enmity from time to time. Whenever the leaders of both communities met and seriously tried to bring about a compromise, the British Government was successful in keeping the diehard Muslims away from the Hindus and the nationalist Muslims, by throwing some more power in their way. The newspapers, blowing the official trumpet were also useful in picking holes in the negotiations. Because of these intricacies ladders appeared in the closely knit fabric of the country. And the poor, uneducated and ignorant people suffered the most when there were communal riots.

The approach of different leaders towards this question varied according to their nature and character. The nationalist Congress also did not have a definite attitude regarding the communal question. By that time Gandhiji had a unique place in the Congress leadership. All the people among the leaders of different bents of mind had confidence and respect for his truth and honesty; they appreciated his tact, were dazzled by his ideals and were astonished by his social conduct. All these people perhaps felt more a sense of wonder rather than respect, about Gandhiji's method of working. His chief virtue was that there was never any discrepancy between his word and deed. He spoke what he thought and did what he said. Another of his virtues was that he was ever aware and always active. Even the young leaders of the Congress could not excel him in his proficiency. Transcending both the above virtues he had the virtue, or rather the strength, of the medium of non-violence, to be used in political, economic and social fields.

Gandhiji put his non-violence at stake against the most confusing, the most intricate and the most wily problem — the communal problem. For him to accept a challenge against non-violence was to accept it against himself. On the one hand, the unsolved communal question was hurting him, on the other, the inadequacy in the negotiations was troubling him. As he usually did about unsolved problems, he made an effort at finding the solution to these problems by searching deep into his inner self.

In a telegram, sent on 16th September, he said, "I AM ANXIOUSLY PRAYING FOR LIGHT."⁷

The only means he had was prayer. This refuge had never disappointed him. To purify further, Gandhiji at times did such penance that the outside world got a shock and that agitated his own colleagues. This penance was to go on a fast.

On 18th September, he started his fast with prayers at Maulana Mohammed Ali's residence. The fast was of 21 days' duration. Regarding this he wrote to Motilal Nehru, who was conducting negotiations on the very day for communal unity: "I have taken

what might be the final plunge. My fast of 21 days commences from today. That is how I have learnt to understand religion ”⁸

Gandhiji's body had not got used to fasting. No doubt, he had taken recourse to fast more than had any other leader. But its effect on his body was just like that of another inexperienced person. He would start getting nausea on the third day of the fast. He could not even take water. So whenever he undertook the fast as a vow, he allowed himself to take soda bicarb, or fresh lime or a few drops of orange juice with water. Normally on the fifth or the sixth day of the fast he used to pass acetone in the urine. During the fast he lost weight at a regular pace. The only difference was that his mind did not concentrate on food and he did not constantly feel the pangs of hunger. He used to lie down with a quiet mind after finishing the daily routine and during these quiet moments, hours and days, his mind turned inward. He could have such communion with his inward soul that he almost held a conversation with it and through that communication he obtained new light and strength. Actually he would decide to undertake a fast only after having established a prayerful communication with his inner self, a process which could have begun before his decision to fast. But this process with which he arrived at this decision was his alone. In other words, the decision was between him and his God. He got the answers to questions such as whether the fast will be of a fixed duration or not, and if of fixed duration, the number of days involved, during this internal communication before the fast. Many leaders considered this inner voice as imaginary or highly mysterious. Some were used to it. But they did not try to change the decision, realising that they could not do anything about it. Many were shocked at such a sudden decision. People like Mahadev tried to find out its secret, but would forget everything else in their anxiety about Bapu's health.

Mahadev wrote an article in *Young India* about what he remembered of the discussion he had with Gandhiji regarding the fast. It reveals the amount of mental agony Gandhiji must have gone through about the country's situation before the announcement of the fast :

Once he asked me, "Do you see the meaning of my fast on account of the Bombay and Chauri Chaura incidents ?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then why cannot you see the meaning of this fast ?"

I said, "There you fasted by way of penance for what you thought was a crime committed by you. There is no such thing here. There is not the semblance of an offence that may be attributed to you."

"What a misconception? In Chauri Chaura the culprits were those who had never seen me. Today the culprits are those who know me and even profess to love me."

I said, "Shaukat Ali and Mohammed Ali are trying their best to quench the conflagration. But it is beyond them. Some men may be beyond their reach, even your reach. What can they do? What can you do? The situation will take time to improve."

"That is another story. Shaukat Ali and Mohammed Ali are pure gold. They are trying their best, I know. But the situation is out of our hands today. It was in our hands six months ago. I know my fast will upset them. Indirectly it might have an effect on their minds, but it was not meant to produce an effect on anyone's mind."

"That's all right, but you have yet to tell me where your error lay for which you are doing this penance."

"My error? Why, I may be charged with having committed a breach of faith with the Hindus. I asked them to befriend Muslims. I asked them to lay their lives and their property at the disposal of the Mussalmans for the protection of their holy places. Even today I am asking them to practise *ahimsa*, to settle quarrels by dying, not killing. And what do I find to be the result? How many temples have been desecrated? How many women come to me with complaints? As I was saying to Hakimji yesterday, Hindu women are in mortal terror of Mussalman *goondas*. In many places they fear to go out alone. I had a letter from . . . How can I bear the way in which his little children were molested? How can I now ask the Hindus to put up with everything patiently? I gave them the assurance that the friendship of Mussalmans was bound to bear good fruit. I asked them to befriend them, regardless of the result. It is not in my power today to make good that assurance, neither it is in the power of Mohammed Ali or Shaukat Ali. Who listens to me? And yet I must ask . . . the Hindus even today to die and not to kill. I can teach them the way to die by my own example. There is no other way . . ."

"I launched non-co-operation. Today I find that people are non-co-operating against one another, without any regard for non-violence. What is the reason? Only this, that I myself am not completely non-violent. If I were practising non-violence to perfection, I should not have seen the violence I see around me today. My fast is therefore a penance. I blame no one. I blame only myself. I have lost the power wherewith to appeal to

people Defeated and helpless, I must submit my petition in His Court. Only He will listen, no one else.

It was a torrent I could hardly catch, much less reproduce.

"But Bapu, should the penance take only this shape, and no other ? Is fasting prescribed by religion ?"

Bapu said : "Certainly, what did the *rishis* of old do ? It is unthinkable that they ate anything during their penances — in some cases, spent in caves, and for hundreds of years. Parvati who did penance to win Siva would not touch even the leaves of trees, much less fruit or food. Hinduism is full of penance and prayer

"I have decided on this fast with deeper deliberation than I gave to any of my previous fasts. I had such a fast in my mind, even when I conceived and launched non-co-operation. At that time, I said to myself, 'I am placing this terrible weapon in the hands of the people. If it is abused I must pay the price by laying down my life.' That moment seems to have arrived today. The object of the previous fasts was limited. The object of this is unlimited, and there is boundless love at the back of it. I am today bathing in the ocean of love."⁹

On the same day that is the 18th September he gave a short statement clarifying his stand and the reason for his fast :

"The recent events have proved unbearable for me. My helplessness is still more unbearable. My religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which one cannot remove, one must fast and pray. I have done so in connection with my own dearest ones.

"Nothing evidently that I say or write can bring the two communities together. I am therefore imposing on myself a fast of 21 days, commencing from today and ending on Wednesday, October 8. I reserve the liberty to drink water with or without salt. It is both a penance and a prayer. As penance I need not have taken the public into confidence, but I publish the fast as an effective prayer both to Hindus and Mussalmans, who have worked in unison, not to commit suicide. I respectfully invite the heads of all the communities, including Englishmen, to meet, and end this quarrel which is a disgrace to religion and humanity. It seems God had been dethroned. Let us reinstate Him in our hearts."¹⁰

But his own inner self had opened up. Here is a touching letter of 17th September, the day prior to his fast, to his bosom friend, Charlie Andrews.

"Delhi, 17-9-1924

"My dearest Charlie,

Don't you fret over my decision. It has been taken after deep prayer and clearest possible indication. This fast of 21 days is the least I can do. Oh the agony of it all ! Every day has been a day of torture. But I shall soon be at peace. I was longing to see my duty clearly. The light has come like a flash. Can a man do more than give his life ?

With the dearest love,

Yours,

Mohan."¹¹

During the fast Mahadev went through emotional upheavals. Consequently, every week during the fast and upto four weeks after the fast was over, he gave such touching descriptions of his experience that it made him an all time great as a journalist. A few of the descriptions are given here : Gandhiji had observed silence at the start of the fast. Mahadev was on the point of despatching the first day's matter for *Navajivan*, after Gandhiji's approval when he wrote. "Don't discuss with me, at least today, the resolve I have made but accept it silently and cheerfully."¹²

Mahadev quoted the above and wrote :

"His weekly silence observed on Wednesday is not yet over. The heart that was stirred to its depth has taken the terrible vow of 21 days' fast and asked me in addition not to discuss it but to seal my lips. It is meet therefore that I should observe silence after merely stating the above fact. He has been crying out every moment to have faith in God. Let me not scatter his precept to the winds by expressing grief at his step."¹³

These seven weekly letters about Gandhiji's fast in Delhi, written by Mahadev, describe the fast in a way which created anxiety and yet purified the atmosphere with the fragrance of prayer and faith. Let us experience that fragrance.

Mahadev started during the first week, quoting a *bhajan* by Pritamdas, *Hari-no-Marag chhe-shurano, Nahin-Kayar-nun-Kam-jone* (The way of the Lord is for the brave - Cowards have no place there) :

"Bapu himself usually begins the prayer here. He himself sings the *slokas* (Sanskrit verses) fervently and himself selects the hymn to be sung. Since the arrival of Balkoba, the congregation has increased in number and the attendants are moved by a surge of love and devotion for God. . . . This morning, Gandhiji grew impatient and before Balkoba could begin he said, 'Sing that hymn - *Hari-no-Marag.*' "

The statement that there was the 'surge of love' probably best described his own feelings. He added :

"My last letter ended in a note of uneasiness and I was not sure if I could regain sufficient composure for a second letter. For two days the anguish continued and no attempt to stop the torrent of tears could succeed. Impelled by waves of disturbing thoughts such as, 'Ah, if Bapu could be persuaded to give up the fast !! Lord forbid it, but if his body is unable to stand it, what, O what may happen !', I used to besiege Bapu with my pleadings, even though I was forbidden to do so."¹⁴

The readers of *Navajivan*, who were unable to be physically near Gandhiji, but whose thoughts were with the fasting leader in his bed must have felt relieved after reading Mahadev's words, that if not they, at least *one of them* was present there. To write the extremely popular weekly letters was a comfort to Mahadev, because the one whom he loved was loved by many. He never believed in hoarding, taking care of or hiding his love. And so, not only with his loved one but also with his readers he could achieve a close relationship — almost a one-ness. Further :

"The next morning therefore Bapu told me, 'I am prepared to discuss with you all the 24 hours, but I want you to understand this fast.' Then he gave me a good long time to explain his stand and in a very short time thereafter I felt unexpectedly most tranquil. The beginning of this letter is made without a trace of uneasiness. This shows how calm I am. Not only have I regained my peace of mind, but every word of the hymn 'The path of the Lord' seems now to flood the heart with an entirely new light. The reason for this change is *shravan* (receptive hearing) and *manan* (meditation on what was heard). I saw immediately that *shravanbhakti* is the greater need of the moment than *ashrubhakti*. And as my *shravan* increased my *manan* also increased with it with the result that today I am at peace with myself."¹⁵

I was ordered not to argue. But how could Maulana be ordered ? He was told not to cry and have patience. He argued whilst weeping. Argued with loving anger :

"What is this Bapu ? Is this the kind of *mohabbat* (love) you have for us ? You have simply cheated us. You will take every step after consultation with us — that was our understanding. Has it evaporated ?"

"But can there not be some things about which I have to render my account to Khuda first and last ?"

"But you have made Khuda the witness between you and us "

"No, we are both Khuda's bondsmen. Both of us are pledged to Him. It was with Him that I hold converse today. This thing, fasting at the call of God, by its very nature, is such as forbids consultation with others. It is bred in my bones. My whole life has been built upon its basis. All my former fasts had been undertaken without anybody's previous consultation."

"But may it not be a hasty step when it is taken so suddenly? You simply laugh it out, you don't worry at all but have you thought of what happens to us?"

"Everything will go well with you. And why do you take it for granted that I shall die?"

Hakimji also was really worried. He held, ". . . Give us a fortnight's notice. You may freely go on a fast if the situation in the country does not improve within fifteen days. We won't stop you then." He was given a reply in his own words. "All right. Try that method of a fifteen days' notice. Don't publish the news of my fast for 15 days and let nobody come here. And then at the end of that period you may come here and tell me that the country is quiet. I will end my fast six days after that report." Hakim Saheb could not help smiling. When he mentioned the possibility of deterioration of health during the fast, Gandhiji told him, "I am certain that even after 21 days' fast my health will be better than yours at least." ⁶

Maulana Shaukat Ali was out of Delhi. He came on the third day. Mohammed Ali hoped that Gandhiji could be persuaded to give up the fast with the help of his elder brother, because Gandhiji had consoled him by offering to give up the fast if Shaukat Ali could convince him that he had greatly erred in fasting. But in Mahadev's words, "Shaukat Ali heard Bapu quietly without arguing and at the end saying, 'Yes Sir, it is all right', he came out without too long a talk." Mahadev said, "If I could describe those talks even partially, I could shed some more light on the mystery of the fast." It was Mahadev's duty to present Gandhiji's thoughts to the people in a manner in which they could understand. And so here is the gist of the conversation between Shaukat Ali and Gandhiji where Gandhiji did most of the talking:

"What have we done yet Mahatmaji, to remedy the situation?" Shaukat Ali exclaimed. "Almost nothing! You have been preaching through your paper, but you have undertaken no long journey. Pray, travel through the affected areas and purify the atmosphere. . . ."

Gandhiji replied "It is for me purely a matter of religion. I looked around me, and questioned myself, and found that I was powerless. What could I effect even by means of a long tour? The masses suspect us today. Pray, do not believe that

the Hindus in Delhi fully trust me. They were not unanimous in asking me to arbitrate. And naturally, there have been murders. How can I hope to be heard by those who have suffered? I would ask them to forgive those who have murdered their dearest ones. Who would listen to me? The Anjuman (a Muslim organisation) refuses to listen to Hakimji. When we were in the midst of negotiation about their arbitration, I heard of Kohat, the place where communal fury burst out wildly. I asked myself, 'What are you going to do now?' I am an irrepressible optimist but hopes should be based on some foundation, while you, at times, base your hopes on sand. No one will listen to you today. In Visnagar in Gujarat, they gave a cold shoulder to Mr. Abbas Tyabji and Mahadev. In Ahmedabad a storm was nipped in the bud. Some trouble was brewing in Umreth when I left Gujarat. That I should be a passive witness to all these, shows the depth of my incapacity. There are hundreds of sisters whose love and affection I still possess. They are in mortal fear today. To them I want to show by my own example the way to die.

"Fight. I do not mind if it be fair, honourable, brave fighting between the two communities. But today it is all a story of unmitigated cowardice. They would throw stones and run away, murder and run away, go to court, put up false witnesses and cite false evidence. . . You are trying your best. But I should also try my best. I must recover the power to react on them."

"No," rejoined Shaukat Ali, "you have not failed. The people are not ready for the medicine you gave them. They will realise that what Gandhi said was right when the disease will break out in its full force. But today it seems as if you are wrestling with God. You instilled courage in both the communities — at least to some extent — and a remarkable miracle occurred in a few days. But the dose of your medicine was not enough. The seed you have sown is not going to perish. Why do you feel that the communal illness has increased? They listened to you. They were listening to you. In your absence they had other advisers. They listened to their advice and took to evil ways. They will still see the folly of their ways, I am sure. You have done much to reduce the poison in the popular mind. I would not bother about these disturbances at all. I would simply go and tell them, 'Devils, play this game to your heart's content. God is still there. You may kill one another. You cannot kill Him.' Nobody will listen to either of us today because of the poison and the blind

monstrosity seen all round. They might listen when they are tired of fighting. Neither mosque nor temple could be destroyed just by people breaking the structures. They could immediately be constructed as we have bricks, lime, water and stone in abundance. What else can I say? I feel ashamed to speak to you. How can I explain? Please do not fast thus."

Gandhiji said, "I wrestle with God? If there is pride or defiance in me it is all over with me. Dear man, this fast is the result of several days' continued prayers. I have got up from sleep at 3 o'clock in the night and have asked Him what to do. On the 17th of September the answer came like a flash! If I have erred, He will forgive me. All I have done, all I am doing, is done in a fully God-fearing spirit, and in the house of a God-fearing Mussalman at that. My religion says that only he who is prepared to suffer can pray to God. Fasting and prayer are common injunctions in my religion. But I know of this sort of penance even in Islam. In the life of the Prophet I have read that the Prophet often fasted and prayed and forbade others to copy him. Someone asked why he did not allow others to do the thing he himself was doing. 'Because I live on food divine', he said. He achieved most of his great things by fasting and prayer. I learnt from him that only he can fast who has inexhaustible faith in God. . . .

"The one flaw in my fast is that there is an effort to indirectly influence the people. I cannot bear the people accusing you and your brother of having broken your promises to me. I must die for it. This fast is but to purify myself, to strengthen myself.

"Let me not be misunderstood. I am speaking to you as though I was a Mussalman, because I have cultivated that respect for Islam which you have for it. After I have fasted and prayed, I shall be all the stronger, with all my reverence for Islam, to appeal to both the communities.

"It is my one firm belief that the strength of the soul grows in proportion as you subdue the flesh. We have to fight hooliganism and we are not sufficiently strong to fight it."

"One more question," said Shaukat Ali. "Do you need to consult no one before arriving at such a decision?"

"No. It is a matter between me and my Maker. . . . Let God keep this body if He has still to make some use of it. . . . In fact, I had thought of going on a permanent vow of fasting, if matters did not improve after the fast terminated. But Maulana and Hakimji asked me not to think of it."

The talks would have continued, but Gandhiji was tired. As Shaikat Ali rose he said, "Three things I pray for every day; the first is Hindū-Muslim Unity, the second, that my mother may live to see Islam and India free; the third, that Mahatma Gandhi's mission may be fulfilled."¹⁷

In the first week's report of the fast, the arguments which took place during the interviews were such that could bring out the secret of the fast. It was natural that the news about Gandhiji's health took precedence over other matters.

"At the end of the second week the body appears a little more reduced, but the lustre on the face is as glowing as of old, with the difference that it wears a specially kindly and gentle look."¹⁸

In this first sentence of the article Mahadev expressed the essence of Gandhiji's activities during the fast :

" . . he keeps lying all the day. Only for the sake of spinning, he seems to be exercising his will power. The doctors had advised him to give up spinning. But Gandhiji, who was behaving like a perfectly obedient patient in all other matters, challenged them in this. It was the doctors who had to acknowledge defeat, for at the end of half an hour of spinning, there was not only no sign of greater strain but their examination revealed an even healthier pulse ! They had to admit : 'This spinning is for you a tonic.' "

Gandhiji wrote a long letter to the members of the Unity Conference. Thereafter the doctors realised that he ought to be allowed to write whatever he wanted to, because he has been distributing doses of nectar through his writing.

The visitors also helped Gandhiji in their own way. Pandit Malaviya read out the episodes of Dhruva and Prahlada, and arranged for melodious hymns to be sung daily for two hours. Mahadev commented on it thus :

"However much one may abstain from the food for the body, renunciation of the food for the soul is unthinkable. Only then can a man get at the enjoyment of immortality when the food for his soul goes on increasing day by day. It seems as if Gandhiji is furnishing us with an object lesson on that memorable dictum - 'Through their renunciation alone did the Gods come to enjoy the drink of immortality.'¹⁹

"It is a matter of superb joy to Drs. Ansari and Abdur Rehman to examine Gandhiji twice a day. But another doctor also, a Dr. Sen who tests Gandhiji's urine, attends on him with extraordinary devotion. One day he remarked to Andrews . 'I never dreamt that a day was to come when I would get this

glorious chance of serving Gandhiji this way.' On the sixth day of the fast, poisonous substances were found in the urine to an alarming extent . . . The news spread dismay. Immediately on hearing it Hakim Saheb Ajmal Khan who could not attend even the Unity Conference owing to his own poor health, left for Gandhiji's residence. . . . It was Gandhiji's silence day . . . Hakim Saheb pleaded his case very persistently. To him Gandhiji wrote in Urdu: 'Please be good enough to wait till tomorrow. I will explain everything then.' Hakimji retorted, 'That you will. But it is we who want to have our say and listen to us — you shall.' Gandhiji simply kept smiling all the while that Hakimji argued. At last Gandhiji was constrained to write again in Urdu: 'God willing, you will find nothing in the urine tomorrow.' That provoked Hakimji to a broad laugh and he broke out: 'O, you are a *vali*, a *mahatma*, and you can say so. But I am a physician. How can I have that trust?' Gandhiji simply smiled again in reply. Hakimji went away defeated to return on the morrow. . . . To other doctors Gandhiji said: 'Why have you raised all this commotion for nothing? Why all this alarm from the urine analysis when in all other respects, I am much better than you would wish anybody to be?' 'Nobody denies that you are keeping well,' put in Dr. Abdur Rehman, 'but the virus has grown to such an alarming extent that all your good symptoms will be of no avail to us if it increases only slightly now. The pulse may then be all right, the heart regular, respiration O.K., and yet the brain may be affected and we become helpless . . .' Gandhiji quietly wrote down: 'All right. But let us wait till tomorrow. We will discuss the matter reading tomorrow's analysis. . . .' The doctors insisted that he should take some sugar, but Gandhiji confronted them with another vow of desisting from taking anything after evening twilight. Mahadev commented: 'How is it possible to pierce through the shell of a soul that has made itself invulnerable by taking many vows?' The doctors were afraid of putting Gandhiji's brain to strain by drawing him into lengthy arguments and so they put forth the final argument, 'We request you to understand how serious our responsibility is.' Mahadev comments: 'Who can measure the depth of Gandhiji's perplexity when the question whether to yield to this loving appeal or remain firm was posed before him? He wrote again — one trenchant, piteous cry: 'In any case please have pity on me — till only tomorrow.' The doctors' loving hearts were touched at this lamb-like cry of helplessness. For a long while dead silence prevailed! At the sight of the doctors'

gloomy silence, instead of appealing to them to have mercy on him, Gandhiji was moved to pity them and began trying to appease them. He wrote a note at some good length to request them to keep patience. Dr. Ansari continued with his plea a bit further, but Gandhiji concluded the discussion with two words, 'Everything tomorrow.' He took off his spectacles, which the doctors realised, was a polite but decisive notice for closure of the discussion. They, therefore, got up. But as he was rising, Dr. Rehman said, 'It would not be surprising, if simply your will-power arrests the growth of poisonous elements.' And Gandhiji responded with a childlike, unaffected smile of self-confidence, i.e. faith in God."

Mahadev commented :

"I do not see the necessity of even begging the readers' pardon for recounting this historic anecdote word for word. The doctors came out. Dr. Ansari remarked, 'I have decided. I am spending the night right here.' Dr. Rehman thought that nothing was going to happen till the next morning, but he said, 'Let us first see the evening analysis and then decide.' They both went to the city and knew of the evening analysis there. The noxious elements had disappeared almost completely! Dr. Sen, poor man, was puzzled. Such an alarming percentage in the morning and next to nil in the evening! 'May there not be an error?' suggested a friend. Dr. Sen felt pricked: 'If I err in the urine examination of such a man as Gandhiji, all my reputation goes to the bottom of the sea.' That night Gandhiji was treated with a new rich dish of spiritual food. The Bishop of Calcutta, the Chief Bishop of India . . . came. He waited for two hours. He did not want to go upstairs and disturb Gandhiji. But Gandhiji, himself, requested him to join the prayers and sing the hymn, 'Lead Kindly Light'. And Gandhiji closed his eyes for the night with the words 'One step enough for me' ringing in his ears and the message of 'Lead Kindly Light' evoking his contemplation in the mind."

About the third week, Mahadev says :

"The whole week, I may say without exaggeration, was spent in the one longing to totally eradicate *dehatmabhava* (man's rooted sense of consciousness in the body). For that he would ask Vinoba to read to him two or three chapters from the Bhagwadgita and make Balkobaji sing to him more than one hymn. For the last four days, moreover, Vinoba recites Kathopanishad to him every evening. As he remembers the whole of the treatise, why should he need a light for the purpose? In perfect quietude and serenity of mood he sings one

part daily and gives his exposition on the same. When Bapu listens to the *akhyan* (story) of Nachiketa, the prince among the adepts of spiritual wisdom, Bapu closes his eyes literally and figuratively against the rush of world currents.²⁰

Mahadev describes the ending of the fast in the following words :

"While this upheaval was still going on, the 8th of October Dasserah, the holy day of conquest came up. Telegrams of felicitations, etc., for the successful termination of the fast began to pour in. . . . The whole hall on the lower floor was filled up with men. Exactly when the clock struck twelve, Bapu began to call up friends from below one after another. The first to be invited were Imam Saheb, Balkoba and Andrews. Eyes bedewed with tears, there was Shankarlal Banker already by Bapu's bedside. Bapu called him close to his side and stroked him. The doctors were then called up 'Is there no one else below?' he inquired, and someone answered 'There are so many others. The Ali Brothers, Begum Saheb, Mr. and Mrs. Das, the Nehrus — Mr and Mrs Motilalji and Jawaharlal and his wife all are waiting downstairs.' Bapu then asked somebody to call all of them upstairs. Dr Ansari could not withhold his tears when he approached Bapu and bent down to embrace him. Then came Mohammed Ali. He kept at a respectful distance 'Come, brother, come near,' accosted Bapu. He too folded up Bapu closely in his arms and shed tears. Everyone then sat down. Imam Saheb was asked to begin Khuda's prayer as given in the Quran-e-Sahreef. With a loud and lusty voice he sang the first *sura* (verse) '*Bismilla-i-rahman-i-raheem*'. Then with the same decorum and propriety Andrews was asked to sing :

'When I survey the Wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of glory died.'

"Among those present there were two other Christians besides Andrews Sudhir Rudra and George Joseph. For a while, as the song was being sung, everyone experienced perfect unison between the sufferings on the Cross and those on the fasting bed, between the love and tears of Jesus and the love and tears of Bapu, and one could see many eyes streaming with tears. After these two, Vinoba was called to recite a *mantra* from the Upanishad. The whole hall was filled with the mystical glory and greatness of Truth extolled in the *mantra* and sung by him in his melodious tune.

"Then Balkoba sang '*Vaishnava jana to*' and after it '*Jaya Jagadish Hare*' (Victory to Lord Hari!) and at last the prayer ended with the *dhun* (repeated chanting) :

'Though life be lost
To Truth I'll hold;
That was the maxim
With Raghavas bold.'

"In a voice faltering with emotions, Bapu then began .

"Hakim Saheb and Mohammed Ali,

"These twenty one days of fasting have passed in deep peace. Unity between Hindus and Mussalmans is not with me a new fangled craze. I have been cherishing that ideal for the last thirty years. I am mad after it and yet I have not been successful so far. I do not know what the Lord wishes. When I took the vow of fasting for 21 days, I had apportioned it into two parts. One part ends today. The other I had suspended at the desire of Hakimji and other friends. Even if I had not done so, my fast would have ended definitely today, owing to the successful termination of the Unity Conference. Today I beg of you to give me a promise — the promise has, in fact, already been given — that you will die for Hindu-Muslim Unity."²¹

And Mahadev summarises this penance for unity thus :

"And who can doubt that nothing but nectar is going to come out of this churning of the great ocean? Only, this tremendous stirring becomes unbearable to the sight of the ordinary erring human. 'If such a terrific storm rages even after such a titanic *tapasya* as his, how much greater suffering may have to be undergone for gaining perfection or total oneness with everything and everybody?' — that is the distressing thought that strikes our poor human intelligence which then confesses its helplessness."²²

In the week after the fast Mahadev created a lively atmosphere by describing the heartening incidents about people visiting Gandhiji, along with the news about his health. To Mahadev the importance or otherwise of the interviewers did not matter. What mattered was the subject discussed with Gandhiji. Here is an instance .

"One day a woman came up and beseeched us, 'Please, do let me go. I want to put him a question.' We thought she might be some unhappy woman who wanted to pour out the anguish of her soul regarding her family affairs or the like and we were reluctant to let her go inside, but were compelled to yield to her very persistent entreaty. She asked only one question : 'Mahatmaji, how should one do *bhakti* (worship, prayer, etc) ? I wish to do Lord Shiva's *bhakti*. Tell me how I must do it.' Gandhiji was taken aback for a while and then in a pathetic tone said, 'Sister ! How can I tell you how ? I myself do not know how to do *bhakti*. All I know and can say is this. 'Be

good and do good' The simple-minded woman felt relieved and happy and went her way But that question, it appears, revolved in Bapu's mind continuously One is, naturally, struck with wonder why the man, who was immersed in *bhakti* all these days and whose every action, it appears clearly, is dedicated to the Lord, should have been impelled to give such a halting answer to that woman. 'As God is beyond description in language, so is His *bhakti*' may be the reason. Whatever it be, since the very next day, Bapu got the eleventh section of Bhagwat regularly read to him."²³

Mahadev felt a bit confused whilst describing these incidents.

"Somebody may grumble, 'O, he is boring us with his talk of love' Amongst the people who corresponded with Bapu there were some critics who said this. Referring to them Mahadev says: 'I am neither love-mad nor Gandhi-mad I do, indeed, try to develop my devotion and my heart melts at any extraordinary manifestation of goodness or love in an individual or event It is not Bapu's praise that I am never tired of singing but I bear witness to the immense power which unalloyed love possesses I merely show to the world how through the many events, big and small, of his life Bapu is training himself, throwing himself into a crucible for self purification and testing his strength of character I only wish everyone else may learn to analyse his thoughts and acts likewise and be inspired with hope at Bapu's example It is to me a matter of regret, not pleasure, that in Bapu's own paper, his praises appear even indirectly. That is exactly why I have given vent to my uneasiness at the beginning of this letter.'"²⁴

But Mahadev's love was not for Bapu alone. Every one who loved Bapu became doubly loved by Mahadev. And he made some individuals immortal through his descriptions about whom otherwise the world may not even have known. Here is an instance.

"He was a Muslim gentleman. For 15 to 20 days at a stretch, he used to come every morning 'Is Gandhiji busy?' If some leaders have come, I don't want to see him,' he would say and quietly wait in the room below for three or four hours. If sometimes he got a chance, he would go upstairs, catch a glimpse of Gandhiji, come down to wait again and then go away Even this gentleman's patience was at last exhausted. He declared to Gandhiji his resolve to dedicate his whole property to him and had a talk with him Gandhiji told him, 'No property ever stands on my name. You may treat that property as a trust from God and maintain yourself by opening a Khadi shop and propagate Khadi' I thought he should be satisfied

with this much, but he came to me and said - 'I am going home. Please send me in writing what Gandhiji has said.' I lost my temper and blurted out, 'What is this madness? Can you not remember what he told you? Why assume that others will not accept your word?' He was hurt but said not a word, as he had trained himself in forbearance more than I. But again on the next day he came and waited. I had at last to go to Gandhiji and tell him that the gentleman wanted a written message from him. 'Has he come today again?' asked Gandhiji. 'Bring him to me.' I took him to Gandhiji. As he was going up the ladder, his eyes were flooded with tears. Gandhiji made him sit close by and wrote the letter he wanted. As he was taking it away he said, 'Please put your hand upon my head. Bless me so that I have the courage to act rightly for my spiritual good.' At the very sight of the letter and of the love Gandhiji had poured therein, the consciousness of my own unworthiness dawned on me and I bowed to that gentleman many times as I bade him farewell."²⁵

Here is another instance :

"Another gentleman visited Bapu one night. He was a Rajput hailing from the Punjab. It was 9 p.m. when he came up with his two children. Andrews is the very model of considerateness and when he speaks slowly in Hindi his language acquires immediately a softness and charm all its own. He said, 'You see, it's 9 p.m., Gandhiji went to bed just a few minutes before. Can you not come again tomorrow?' The visitors replied with the same sweetness. 'Yes, we can, definitely. But we may not break our fast before having Gandhiji's *darshan*. We are hungry.' That melted Andrews at once. 'Then I can take you up, if you are satisfied with the sight of Gandhiji from a distance. If you go near him, he may perhaps wake up,' said Andrews. 'Agreed. His *darshan* from a distance is enough for us,' the visitors replied. Immediately all of them went up and returned after two or three seconds. When they were leaving, they called Andrews to them and said, 'Please accept these two thousand and five hundred rupees. They are to be used by Gandhiji in any way he likes. We had come here to give that amount. It is not possible for us to come again tomorrow.'"²⁶

Actually, during this period, Mahadev had taken down verbatim, important discussions Gandhiji had with Dilipkumar Roy about music, with Khwaja Hasan Nizami about the Hindu Muslim question, and with G. Ramachandran about art, machines and celibacy. We will end this chapter about Gandhiji's *Ekatayagna* by

quoting some important parts of Mahadev's diary. In a letter Gandhiji wrote about Krishna :

"I bow down a thousand times to that Krishna, who is the inspirer of the Gita, the Lord of sixteen thousand senses (capillaries ?), the Perfect, never failing *Brahmachari*; Immutable and Lord of our heart, and not to any other"²⁷
He told Khwaja Nizami :

"I do not believe that Islam owes its spread to the power of the sword. It is the *fakirs* of Islam who have propagated it. It is truthfulness, renunciation and courage that have made it so widely accepted. Everyone will agree that the sword has defended Islam, but the honour of spreading it goes to none but its *fakirs*. That is why I affirm that the propaganda of Islam by physical force, by temptation and such other means will not serve Islam but only harm it. And this also I say because I love Islam."²⁸

Gandhiji undertook many long and short fasts before and after 1924. But Jawaharlal was shocked by this fast. He wrote to Mahadev, "I am stupefied by the news of Bapu's fast." Rajaji, who did not come to Gandhiji without a reason rushed to Delhi on hearing about the fast. Devdas did not go to Delhi so that he may not disturb Bapu. Manilal came down from Africa to Gandhiji after years, but he did not display any emotionalism. Many friends like Mohammed Ali and Shankarlal Banker expressed their feelings through tears. People like Andrews and Vinoba tried to give peace to Gandhiji through reading from the Bible and recitations from the Upanishads. Mahadev took about a day to understand the basis of the fast, but over the next twenty days he became a prayerful witness of the penance and distributed his overflowing devotion among others. Mahadev was a witness to the fact of the care and nursing and service Bapu received during this period, but that did not detract from Mahadev's worry about his physical health. It had not been noted on this occasion, but later on during other fasts Mahadev lost almost as much weight as Gandhiji during his fast, despite taking his meals twice daily. When Gandhiji undertook a fast, Mahadev's already heavy workload increased. Gandhiji had explained to his colleagues the reason for not maintaining the responsibility and the consequent worry of editing *Young India* and *Navajivan* during and after the fast. For those weeks he had appointed C. F. Andrews for *Young India* and Mahadev for *Navajivan* as editors. About Andrews and Mahadev he wrote :

"Charlie Andrews insists on editing *Young India* himself during the period of purification and convalescence. I gladly accept the offer. We are as blood-brothers. And the reader will

be glad to have the same message rendered in a more chaste and pure style. English is after all a foreign language for me. Charlie Andrews is master of it. It can therefore only give me pleasure to surrender editorial control of *Young India* to him. Mahadev Desai will be responsible for the editorship of *Navajivan*. Among the Gujaratis I have no more faithful interpreter of my message than he."

FOOTNOTES

1. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 183
2. Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story*, p. 142
3. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol.1, pp. 185-86
4. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 142
5. *Young India*, 11th September 1924, "The Realities," selected.
6. Ibid.
7. CWMG - 25, p. 134
8. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 184
9. CWMG - 25, pp.174, 175, 176
10. Ibid. pp. 171-72
11. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 184
12. Ibid. p. 189
13. Ibid. p. 189
14. Ibid. pp. 191-92
15. Ibid. p. 192
16. Ibid. pp. 192-93
17. Ibid. pp. 196 to 200 (selected)
18. Ibid. p. 203
19. Ibid. pp. 203-205
20. Ibid. pp.205 to 213 (selected)
21. Ibid. pp. 214-15
22. Ibid. p. 216
23. Ibid. p. 218
24. Ibid. p. 233
25. Ibid. pp. 233-34
26. Ibid. pp. 234-35
27. Ibid. p. 130
28. Ibid. pp. 239-40

CHAPTER XXV

STOOPED AND CONQUERED

Gandhiji has now begun to feel that he is his old self again. He tries to walk a little longer than before and in fact he does. His talks with visitors last longer than before and when there is an excess in this regard, the fatigue provides a good warning that his health has not yet returned completely to its pre-fast normal. His weight had gone up by four pounds, to 92 lbs. a few days after the end of the fast but there was no further increase though nearly a week passed.¹

Gandhiji did get some rest, but Mahadev did not have the time to breathe. And yet he never uttered a word of complaint.

For one Penance for Unity Gandhiji underwent twenty-one days' austerities. Now his attention was drawn towards another penance for unity. That penance was to unify the Congress from within. That procedure was even more finely balanced. That was the procedure of stooping to conquer. He clarified how a Satyagrahi should go forward non-violently. In the article of 11th September 1924, in *Young India*, he wrote :

"Our differences are increasing. Each group is making of its programme a matter of principle. Each group sincerely believes that its programme will bring us nearer to the common goal. . . .

"Our non-co-operation was meant to be a living, active, non-violent force matched against the essential violence of the system. Unfortunately, the non co operation never became actively non-violent. We satisfied ourselves with physical non violence of the weak and helpless. Having failed to produce the immediate effect of destroying the system, it has recoiled upon us with double strength. . . . I am just as keen a believer as ever in the five boycotts. . . . But . . . there is no atmosphere for implementing them. . . . The Congress must progressively represent the masses . . . Their political consciousness is not yet awakened . . . Their politics are confined to bread and salt

and adjustments. . . . We must share their sorrows, understand their difficulties. . . . Some of us at least will have to go through the agony and out of it only will a nation full, vigorous and free be born . . . If the whole fight is for 'capturing' the Congress, I must refuse to enter upon it. . . . Those who depend for national regeneration solely on the constructive programme may be expected to lead in the matter of self sacrifice. . . . All I know is that there is no fight left in me. This is too much for a born fighter to say I have fought my dearest ones But I fight out of love. I shall fight the Swarajists too out of love But I must, I see, first prove my love. . . . "

It could be said that Gandhiji spent a considerable amount of time after the fast to prove his love for the Swarajists. He advised both the groups of Pro-changers and No-changers to have distinctly separate programmes, to avoid confrontation and to be helpful to each other.

The fast had defused the Hindu-Muslim quarrels to some extent but the problem was not solved. Gandhiji had, therefore, to pay attention to that question too. His motive was to overcome the disorder in the country and bring about some good management. His way to do was to stoop to conquer.

Just then the Viceroy passed an Ordinance for Bengal and arrested some people and put them under unlimited detention. It was announced that the Ordinance was to control the terrorists but the way it was used, it became evident that it was an attack on the Bengal freedom-fighters Gandhiji became agitated at this.

He went to Calcutta from Delhi, there he gathered together all the Pro-changers and the No-changers He spoke to both the groups together, and also gave detailed explanations separately The distance between the two factions was greatest in Bengal. It was reduced by Gandhiji's first affectionate steps Chittaranjan Das, the Swarajist leader thereby experienced a lot of relief. The very Das Babu who had sharply criticised Gandhiji's step of the suspension of the movement only two years before, became his admirer.

Mahadev has sought to give life to this visit to Calcutta. During the fast he used to write every week as 'First week', 'Second week' and so on There were seven articles With the heading 'A Visit to Calcutta' he began as follows with a para on Gandhiji's fast

"One may feel that all his weakness has left him now But as an eyewitness I know how dead tired he used to feel at the end of his discussions and interviews which started at 4 a.m. and continued right upto 11 p.m. at night And he now feels the accumulated effect of that strain Gandhiji advised everyone to concentrate on Hindu-Muslim Unity, Khadi and Removal of

Untouchability He explained that without unity we were not fit for non-co-operation. Mainly he tried to remove the distrust of the No-changers towards the Pro-changers. His attitude was 'when Dasbabu is in trouble and I do not hasten to help him, my patriotism is put to shame' The Pro-changers put forward innumerable arguments against the condition of a subscription of 2,000 yards of yarn to be given every month by every member of the Congress. But Gandhiji displayed the attitude during his visit to Calcutta, 'Give up as much as possible, help to the extent you can help' And so he accepted that the yarn need not necessarily be spun by one self, it could be spun by others."

He explained to the No-changers :

"It is the very *dharma* of believers in non-violence to continue making sacrifices, till there remains nothing to give"³ He also explained that non-co-operation was not abandoned, it was only suspended for the time being. He also gave up the condition of donning Khadi on every occasion and all the time."

Last he said :

"... my surrender amounts only to a little descent from my own ideal, but is not a surrender of essence or principle . . .

There are two kinds of sacrifices of one's own independent judgment and of one's essential principles. The late Mr. Gokhale used to say that for public good one may make a sacrifice of the first kind, but never of the second."

Mahadev noted down an interesting discussion :

Q : You started non-co-operation with the wicked Government and now you are gradually giving it up . . . you are now preaching co-operation with wickedness. The Swarajists have been guilty of such lies and duplicity that one wonders how co-operation with them is at all possible.

A : I have never said that we must non-co-operate with evil everywhere we find it. We should non-co-operate only when we have to be accessories to wicked acts . . . In this case no occasion has yet arisen that calls for non-co-operation with our brothers or Swarajists. Have we ever co-operated with them to such an extent as to justify non-co-operation now ?

Q : A time was when you were telling us that an honest shoe-black was better than a co-operating lawyer. And now you are going to become a lawyer's and V.I.P.'s man.

Gandhiji replied, "That is a good point. Every word of what I had said was true. But does non-co-operation even exist today ? If non-co-operation were to spread to every nook and

corner of the country, if men of even the boot-black's class were carrying it out to the full, they could keep out the co-operators. . . Had there not been these quarrels, had not the venom spread as far as it has, I would have carried the Congress along the same old rut."⁴

A statement known as the Agreement signed by Gandhiji, Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru was released, after discussions on November 6.

Mahadev described the prevailing atmosphere, he wrote, "After the Agreement was signed, all of them came to Gandhiji before dispersing. Panditji spoke for all of them. He said, 'Gandhiji, now you must give us lessons in spinning. We will leave for our homes only after learning it up from you.' When on the 4th, Mr. Kelkar met Gandhiji for the first time after the agreement, he remarked, 'Let us sit together. Are we not old friends?' 'No,' Gandhiji immediately rejoined, 'old enemies — new friends.' To Rajagopalachari Gandhiji described the agreement as the most important event since the suspension of the movement after Chauri Chaura."

Gandhiji's activities from 1917 to 1947 coincided with the movement of Indian History. Mahadev brought us the innermost story of that history so that we could watch all its twists and turns. But Mahadev was not only a historian, he was the interpreter who presented Gandhiji's points of views in a language which could be understood by the common man. He was a playwright presenting Gandhiji as a highly dramatic personality in a vivid manner. He was a person who painted word pictures of all the men, women, young and old, who came in contact with Gandhiji. He did this with great ease. His pen hardly stopped once he started to write. Mahadev's own life was like a fast moving boat in the lake of devotion.

There were Englishmen who came not only to be friendly with Gandhiji but also to intensify the friendship between India and England. How could such a friendship formed? To one such gentleman Gandhiji said:

"India must be self-dependent; to that end its economic problem must be solved. If the foreign cloth, which has been making India dependent and lifeless, disappears from the land, India can gain the strength to face the world fearlessly. I agree with you when you say that total and absolute non co-operation between Englishmen and Indians is unthinkable. Man will always be dependent on his fellowman. What I want to do is to improve the relationship between the two into one of equality. If it becomes that of the fellowship of man to man, I should feel satisfied. But today you come here to fill your pockets at India's cost and so there is a conflict of interests. And one

party lives upon the life blood of the other. If once that unnatural relationship is ended, a foundation for mutual friendship can be laid. As things stand at present, the Englishman considers himself a superior being. That sense of superiority has but to go.

"And then is the question of Hindu Muslim Unity. It is said that Englishmen desire it, but a suspicion about their bona fides still persists. One cannot help feeling that Englishmen are not sincere in their profession. They should, on the contrary, think that their own interest lies in encouraging unity and should feel the satisfaction of having discharged their duty thereby."⁶

After touching the question of revenue from alcohol Gandhiji came to the most important point :

"Englishmen have such deep rooted distrust of Indians that they have imposed on us an army expenditure of crores of rupees. If Englishmen stay in India only with the good-will of Indians, there would remain no need for an army of foreigners. But today everywhere we find nothing but suspicion and distrust and everywhere barriers of steel walls are raised up.

"If these matters are settled, I for one would give up any talk of a scheme for the granting of Swaraj, because then it would become matter of days before Swaraj itself would come knocking at our door."⁷

Mahadev commented on the entire conversation and wrote :

"The gentleman was quietly listening to all this. He admitted the existence of the superiority complex in Englishmen. He then said . . . that it was a defect of temperament, not of the heart. He accepted the immorality of the excise revenue also. It was only Gandhiji's castigation of the import of foreign cloth and of the heavy army expenditure that he felt himself unable to agree with. He believed that when such a need arose God ordained that one nation should rule over another for the goal of the organisation and that Englishmen were given that divine right.

"Another good-hearted Englishman came to Gandhiji in Calcutta and said to him, 'Your fast had a wonderful effect. I hope you will similarly improve the relationship between Englishmen and Indians.'

"Gandhiji said, 'Yes, that's my life's desire.'

"The Englishman : 'Let me hope, however, you may not have to fast for that purpose.'

"Gandhiji smiled and said, 'No, there is a difference in the relationship between Englishmen and Indians and that between

Hindus and Muslims The Englishman cherishes a feeling of superiority over the Indian There is not that feeling among Hindus and Mussalmans. . . . It requires a greater exertion to win the hearts of Englishmen.'"⁸

Gandhiji's chief complaint against the English was that they had made India weak economically by destroying its crafts and business, physically by starving them; psychologically, by introducing a unsuitable system of education and spiritually, by forcibly disarming its people He had mentioned this thesis in *Hind Swaraj*, and he went on saying the same thing till the end Mahadev went on explaining this in different ways while he lived. His knowledge of ancient culture and his contact with world literature made his pen, effective and sharp. His comments made Gandhiji's thoughts easy to comprehend and effective The English Scholar, Verrier Elwin, said about Mahadev :

"Mahadev's task was to make Gandhi real to millions. He made him perhaps the best known man in the world, certainly the best loved. . . . Without Mahadev a thousand jewels more precious than diamonds would have been lost to the world."⁹

As Verner Elwin had said, understanding and recognition have increased on both sides On one hand Mahadev through his weekly letters made Gandhiji incarnate and worthy of devotion; while on the other, he revealed to the world the modest excellence of many people through these very weekly letters. Those gems are scattered like the stars in the Milky Way in the pages of Mahadev's diaries.

During this visit to Calcutta Mahadev wrote :

"One night one of the last to arrive was a villager with his two children Who would let that poor man come in to see Gandhiji, when even at that late hour there was the inevitable crowd of hundreds waiting outside and it was impossible to allow entry to one and refuse it to another ' So the villager gave his bundle of yarn to the man at the gate and said, 'Please send this yarn to Gandhiji.' Immediately Gandhiji saw the bundle, he called him And the joy of the children and their father knew no bounds !"¹⁰

Mahadev introduced Romain Rolland and Herman Hess to his readers as early as 1924. Romain Rolland would become known to many Indians when Gandhiji met him in 1931 and Herman Hess became world famous after decades through his novel *Siddhartha* At times Mahadev's lucid pen raced with freedom to bring a picture before our eyes, while at other times, it gave the essence of serious thoughts, long speeches and discussions in the briefest possible way, doing full justice to the matter The combination of expansion and

brevity appeared in his writing like the simultaneous presence in the sky of two rare planets

Before writing a detailed report of the All Party Conference which met on 21st and 22nd November in Bombay, Mahadev gave the essence of Gandhiji's activities of the time, viz the attempt to bring together the No-changers and the Pro-changers in just two sentences, and that too in Gandhiji's own words :

"How can I then afford to consult all the No-changers at every new step I take? Non-violence is dear to them, they are worshippers of the cult of non-violence, and so I hope that immediately I give them just a hint, they will catch my interpretation of the *dharma* of non violence and its ever-new implications that suggest themselves to me."¹¹

Or, take the sentence Lala Lajpatrai uttered with complete self control, even when he was irritated during the Congress session at Belgaon — an irritation that was getting intense while talking of the Kohat riots Mahadev noted it down in his diary separating it from the entire speech :

"You must not sin, even if you are sinned against. Vengeance of any kind blocks the uplift of the nation Any harm to a Hindu or a Muslim by an act of anger or reprisal, or by the infliction of a wound, is like a stab in the heart of our motherland."¹²

Gandhiji, with reference to his own writing, was a master of brevity. And that is why it was easy for Mahadev to express very serious matters in a very brief manner The message Gandhiji dictated to Mahadev for the New York periodical, *The World To-Morrow*, covers many aspects of a very serious subject in a very small paragraph :

"My study and experience of non-violence have proved to me that it is the greatest force in the world It is the surest method of discovering the truth and it is the quickest because there is no other. It works silently, almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely It is the one constructive process of nature in the midst of incessant destruction going on about us. I hold it to be a superstition to believe that it can work only in private life. There is no department of life, public or private, to which that form cannot be applied. But this non-violence is not possible without complete self-effacement."¹³

Gandhiji's emphasis on Constructive Work like Hindu Muslim Unity, Khadi and Removal of Untouchability was going to place him in a somewhat unique position amongst other revolutionary leaders. Gandhiji never tired of describing Constructive Work Programme as the positive aspect of Satyagraha. He said :

“ . . . I have with me no other implement, no other weapon, than Satyagraha. Till now I have put before the country the terrible facet of Satyagraha. Now I propose to put only its gentle, attractive, sedate side. If people take to it with zest the result — victory — is a certainty.”¹⁴

People asked Gandhiji whether the Congress would not cease to be a political body if it took up Constructive Work; Gandhiji's answer had a mixture of the ideal and the practical. He said

“No, it won't. . . . I am not a world-renouncing *sadhu* (a recluse or a saint). . . . I am a political-minded man. Only, I am a politician of a gentler kind. . . . I do want to fight, but please let me prepare my army and armoury.”¹⁵

When Gandhiji gave the slogan ‘Self-rule Through Yarn’, he had been talking about the comprehensive programme of Khadi. He said :

“I do not say we can have Swaraj if you alone spin. I do affirm that we can win if all of us spin. Let alone that plea. Whether Swaraj comes from your spinning or not, if you feel for the beggar's plight, I beg of you to spin in pity for him. Be in tune with the submerged; let your heart vibrate in sympathy with them. . . .

“A cotton thread of yarn
Is wound me all around;
The more he draws it tight
The more to him I'm bound,
Love's dart by Hari sent
In twain my heart has rent.

“If we have that love for the crores of our sisters and brothers, they too would bind us tight with the thread of cotton yarn and we them. I know of only that principle of economics and no other.”¹⁶

The greatest revolutionary quality of Gandhiji was to merge his identity with those for whom the revolution was necessary.

“I can be a *bhangi* with *bhangis* or a *dhed* with *dheds* and do their work with equal ease. If untouchability is not destroyed during my present lifetime, and if it is ordained that I should take a second birth, I wish to be born a *bhangi* and none else.”¹⁷

His interpretation of untouchability was broader than normal.

“It is a sin for a Hindu to regard any human being an untouchable on the ground of birth or religion. How then can we, Hindus, look down upon a Muslim brother as an untouchable? If Hinduism consists in regarding followers of

other faiths as untouchables, that Hinduism is certain to meet its doom."¹⁸

Hindu-Muslim Unity was a subject of constant thought for Gandhiji.

"You cannot defend your icons by thrashing or killing the assailant. Mussalmans also will not be able to defend Islam by slaughter. It is dead certain that Islam itself will be exterminated. No religion on earth is going to save itself or flourish by means of the sword. Thirty years of reflection and experience impel me to declare that no man, who wants to save his religion or country, can do so by any other means than that of non-violence. No religion has spread or remained alive by the use of the sword, nor is it ever going to. It is the *fakirs* of Islam and the *sannyasis* of Hinduism who have been the stay and support of their respective religions. Please read your *shastras* with an intelligent, discriminating eye."¹⁹

Gandhiji was extremely anguished at the communal riots that had been taking place at various places. He had advised the Hindu refugees fleeing from Kohat to Rawalpindi not to return to Kohat only on the Government's assurance and to wait until the Muslims there gave them an undertaking of protection. He had written a letter to the Viceroy asking for permission to go to Kohat to conduct an inquiry, but he had not got the permission. He had advised Mahadev to be careful to have in mind, 'Lives may be lost for devotion, the road forward is difficult' !

When Gandhiji sent Swami Anand to Delhi to meet Maulana Mohammed Ali for some work for the *Navajivan* and the *Comrade* periodicals, he wrote to the Maulana :

"I have therefore always said that I must be judged by the test that my closest companions pass through. You, Swami, Mahadev, Hayat, Ashfaq, Moazzam, Devdas, Krishnadas, Shuaib are among them. It is not enough that I can pull on well with you; Swami, Mahadev, Devdas, etc. also ought to do the same. If they cannot, they should disappear from my public life. They are the instruments through which I work, as Hayat, Moazzam are the ones through whom you work. I am therefore sending Swami so that you and he can come near each other and know each other better. For me a proper regulation of these personal relations means more for Swaraj and Unity than a thousand public documents. . . ."²⁰

Gandhiji was very eager that Hindus and Muslims, especially their leaders should work together and try to remove their differences. Mahadev noted :

"We shall know each other better
When the mists have rolled away."

"Gandhiji is very fond of the English hymn which has these lines as its keynote and he is, at present engrossed in scattering the mist of misunderstanding and bring everyone closer to one another."²¹

One may wonder how Gandhiji influenced so many scholars, highly upright men, and thousands of others in the country Mahadev gave an explanation for this from a book then recently published in Italy :

"Like all other founders of religions, St Francis of Assissi held a very high opinion of human nature. The same can be said of Gandhi. He expected from his countrymen a practically impossible achievement. He based his hope of gaining his political goal along the path of self-restraint and peace alone. That was a very abnormal and exacting demand indeed. But the response he got was far greater than ever given anywhere else in the world."²²

The words written by a foreign author and noted down by Mahadev with reference to Gandhiji, reflected his perception of Gandhiji, can be applied to him too. Gandhiji was revealed to the world through his colleagues like Mahadev. It is likely that his expectation helped Mahadev to become worthy of his position. For his whole life Gandhiji went on expecting more and more from Mahadev and thus elevated him higher and higher. When Mahadev worked for *The Independent*, he got some more remuneration than usual and so he sent some amount to the Sabarmati Ashram. Gandhiji wrote about this :

"... I am not a stupid Bania to sell my precious wares cheap by getting you a lucrative post and taking money from you for the Ashram. That much money you can get for the Ashram even by begging."²³

Gandhiji depended on Mahadev from the time he came to him. Just as Mahadev sent all his articles for *Navajivan* and later on for *Harijan* to the press only after showing them to Gandhiji, in the same way Gandhiji also sent all his articles to the press only after Mahadev had seen them. Both discussed not only about the language, but also style, thought and matter and then made the necessary alterations.

Gandhiji also expected help from his linguist friends and that it was "in order to ask my linguist friends to keep watch over my language and to oblige me, even as some other friends have been keeping watch over my moral conduct",²⁴

Valjibhai G. Desai, an *ashramite*, very often suggested detailed corrections regarding Gandhiji's language and also that of many others. Regarding Valji Desai's corrections Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev, "With what laborious care has Valji read *Navajivan* ! Many of his corrections put us all to shame I would certainly hold you responsible for those mistakes if you regularly went through *Navajivan* articles before they were printed. However, I have an unpression that you have not read them. . . I myself am not in a position to go carefully through everything I write, and that too, from the point of view of language And if you or Swami do not take the responsibility of going through the matter carefully, I would not hesitate to stop publishing *Navajivan* A person who cannot do this work to his own satisfaction had better leave it alone. It is his duty to do so."²⁵

Gandhiji's standards were high and rigid in many matters. Mahadev had to become worthy of them He was always ready to be tested by Bapu. In the P.S. to the above letter Gandhiji entrusts another matter to Mahadev, "I have used belief in thought for the word Creed — If you can find a better word, use it."

There might have been oneness in thought and feeling between Gandhiji and Mahadev, but the latter's main emotion was devotion And so even if he could give the gist of Gandhiji's full lecture in a couple of lines, his reverence for Bapu never decreased In *Ramcharitmanas*, Tulsidas cannot desist adding a devotional objective or an admiring exclamation wherever Rama's name appears, so also it is with Mahadev about Gandhiji. He wrote after giving a long report of Gandhiji's address :

"This speech has been given at length . . . in order that every one can see the heart of Gandhiji wounded by strife . . . during these three or four days the Bombay Public had a remarkable experience of the fact that it was possible to give vent to such a white heat of feelings even in a long public speech and that too without any sentimental effusion unrestrained in expression."²⁶

But regarding the meeting at the Excelsior Theatre Mahadev wrote :

"One can give an accurate account only if he can retain a detached outlook. But if the reporter himself is carried away into identifying himself with the scene enacted, who can describe and what ? An exceedingly remarkable instance of good resulting from evil was evidenced at that meeting What was merely formal and complimentary turned suddenly into something intensely serious and natural there One could see then the dazzling flash of the forked lightning of *sat* (truth)

piercing through dark clouds of *maya* (delusion) piled thick one upon another in countless profusion."²⁷

Tulsidas was confused in describing the unmatched beauty he beheld in the pair Rama-Laxman 'Speech is sightless and sight is without speech,' does it not seem that the same confusion might have troubled Mahadev on beholding the beauty of thought in Gandhi?

Once Mahadev had spoken to the students of the Gujarat Vidyapith about his devotion to Gandhiji. He said:

"Mahatmaji's life became artistic, each and every moment. Once, Mahatmaji, Sarladevi Chaudharani, five or six other friends and myself were at Sinhgadh. Sarladevi dazzled everybody as if by a flash of lightning by quickly asking questions. Once she asked me, 'Why are you after Gandhi? Don't you want to serve your country?' She was also astonished at my reply. I said, 'No, I do not want to serve my country, I want to serve Gandhi. I am after Gandhi just as you have said. My country cannot enthuse me nor excite me to the extent that Mahatmaji's life does. Country's service is not for me, and I still believe in that truth. Ruskin has used very beautiful words at some place, "Manufacture of Souls" — I believe that we can consider Mahatmaji a "manufacturer of souls" in this respect. And I am here to witness the fact. You can ask all those whose souls have been awakened, who are reborn.'

"I will relate to you in this context how I was reborn. In 1917 I was with Mahatmaji at Betia. At that time he did not entrust any special work to me . . . But one day — the day I was reborn — he told me to prepare *chapatis*. As I did not know how to cook, I asked, 'How can I make *chapatis*, I don't know how to do it.' Mahatmaji said, 'Here is the flour, the rolling pin, the wooden board, and water. If you start doing it you will learn how to do it.' I accepted the order and somehow prepared the dough. But I asked someone else to roll it and I started roasting it on the griddle. Mahatmaji came after his bath when one *chapati* was ready. He saw the fun there and said to me, 'If I had wanted to eat *chapatis* prepared by someone else why would I have told you to do it?' And he started rolling and roasting the *chapatis*. My training did not stop there. Later on he himself showed how to wash clothes and clean the toilets. I have felt that I was reborn then."²⁸

After the fast for communal harmony Mahadev became the secretary, cook, peon — all rolled in one with regard to Gandhiji's work till the day of the Belgaon Congress. This was a great

responsibility carried with difficulty. Here a few notes are given from the very many scattered ones. A message to an American youth :

"We are taught from childhood, discipline in self-denial. Though, therefore, in the East we never fail to live up to it, we know that life is not for indulgence but essentially for self-denial. Would that the students of America could imbibe that one lesson."²⁹

Vinobaji established the All India Shanti Sena Mandal as late as in 1957. Jayprakash gave it a well-organised form in 1962. But Gandhiji had suggested to Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter of 12th November 1924 :

"It does appear to me to be necessary to have a Flying Column of workers, Hindu and Mohamedan, who would on a moment's notice be ready to go to afflicted parts for investigation. We may not wait always for distinguished men to go."³⁰

During the last days of his fast in Delhi, Gandhiji stayed at the House of Raghuvirsinh Sultansinh near Kashmiri Gate. He was the founder of the Modern School of Delhi. After expressing his pleasure at visiting the School, Gandhiji warned him that, "It will prove very harmful to these young men and young women, if in a rush for modernity, our ancient excellences are allowed to die out."³¹

Even this small comment in a Visitors' Book immediately found place in Mahadev's diary. The Indian Congress of East Africa sent a telegram to Gandhiji regarding their struggle during these days :

NON PAYMENT GOING AHEAD. GOVERNMENT CALLOUS. IMPRISONING, ATTACHING PROPERTY. REQUEST SEND FOUR WORKERS PREFERABLY ANDREWS, VALLABHBHAI, MAHADEVBHAI, DEVDAS. YOU VISIT KENYA. RECOVERY HEALTH.

Gandhiji sent a cable in reply :

DELIGHTED COMMUNITY GOING FORWARD WITH PROGRAMME. SUFFERING SUCCESS. YOURS IF YOU CONTINUE. REGRET UNABLE SEND ANYONE. ANDREWS JOINS. GANDHI.³²

In the same way Gandhiji had refused George Joseph's request to send Mahadev to guide the Vycom Satyagraha. Even from a distance he was guiding them. The important thing was that he had asked those people to abandon the idea of a fast for temple entry for the Harijans, and told them to go and stand quietly and sing *bhajans* at the spot from where the Harijans were not allowed to go any further. Satyagrahis from Kerala acted according to Gandhiji's suggestion. And after a penance of almost fourteen months that famous temple of Travancore opened its gate for the Harijans.

Gandhiji had sent Vinobaji to Kerala (then called Malabar and Trayancore) in 1925 to observe the Vycom Satyagraha closely. Gandhiji's presence during the last days of the Satyagraha had helped to bring about a happy end to the whole episode.

We have almost come to the end of the year. In spite of being the guiding light of the Indian National Congress, it was only at the Belgaon session of 1924 that Gandhiji became its President. It was natural that a devotee like Mahadev should have described with all thankfulness and pride, why Gandhiji accepted the Presidentship and how expertly he guided the session. In spite of the inner pride and thankfulness, he has not missed noting down the ins and outs of the situation, nor has he forgotten to weigh the pros and cons. He was a devotee, but a devotee of a worshipper of truth. And so the guiding star of truth never moved from his horizon. The warmth of devotion and the restraint of the devotion to truth made Mahadev an excellent journalist. As Verrier Elwin had said :

"Mahadev was a journalist, it is true — he had the makings of a very great journalist, but like all the greatest journalists, he had not only a nose for news but a flair for truth. I believe the picture of Gandhi that he gave to the world was true in every respect."³³

As far back as 1911 there was a suggestion of making Gandhiji the President of the Indian National Congress as a result of his work in South Africa. The inspiration for this suggestion came from Gokhale. At that time Gandhiji was occupied with his South African activities. And so he had said that he would accept the position only if he was allowed to go back after the session. But later on he washed his hands off the matter as there was a lot of dissent about the position.

This year he accepted the position because the Congress was divided into two factions and he was needed if they were to be kept together. Gandhiji had corresponded with other leaders at various times during the year. Rajagopalachari, Gangadharrao and Shaukat Ali had been insisting that Gandhiji should become the President. Vallabhbhai and Shankarlal were supporting Gandhiji's intention not to take up the position. Gandhiji was ready to see the reigns of the Congress in the hands of Motilalji and he was himself going to accept the Presidentship only if Motilalji told him to do so after consulting other Swarajists.

Gandhiji had had a shock at the manner in which the Resolutions had been passed with difficulty and by a very small majority in the Working Committee at Ahmedabad in June. He felt almost wounded at the manner in which a murder of an Englishman by Gopinath Sahay, a terrorist, was being considered a praiseworthy

act. And that was why he advised Rajaji and other No changers to give up the Congress posts and clear the way for the Pro-changers. He asked Maulana Shaukat Ali who was insisting on his taking up the Presidentship at Belgaon in a letter written on 27th July 1924 :

“Why do you want me to be President of the Congress ?

. My usefulness is gone if I cannot get the country to adopt Hindu Muslim Unity and the Charkha as articles of national faith.”³⁴

Gandhiji wrote to Motilalji on 15th August : “The more I think of it the more my soul rises against a battle for power at Belgaon ”³⁵

Gandhiji's main intention at this juncture was to prevent the division of the Congress.

It is true that Gandhiji had accepted the moment of becoming the Congress President like a *sthitapragna* (one whose intellect is steadfast) with patience and steadfastness, Mahadev, however, must have felt proud to see his master at the helm of the biggest organisation of the nation. He was neither so detached nor so inert as not to be affected by the delightful situation of Gandhiji's success, but he was also aware that Gandhiji had undertaken this with a definite understanding. And so he concentrated on describing the sagacity of the Captain rather than the stormy waves of the sea or the weak position of the ship. He did not desist from describing the seriousness of the situation but at the same time, he emphasised the points that strengthened Gandhiji's strategy. The accounts of the Belgaon Congress, written by Mahadev, were of the quality of international journalism. No doubt, his style was coated with Indian culture. The introduction of that dramatic description read

“One can only think of Belgaon as a place of pilgrimage

Its atmosphere is saturated with the devout love of Shri Gangadharrao Deshpande; it is charged with the spirit of discipline and obedience; it is permeated with non-violence, which Gandhiji's presence is spreading into it in every action that is taken; and definitely for the purpose of manifesting this non-violence to perfection, the big congregation has gathered here. If a place like this cannot be called a holy land, I would like to know what other name might be given to it.”³⁶

Mahadev's description takes a turn from the recognisable to the indirect, from the obvious to the subtle. Watching Gangadharrao, on horse back, inspecting the arrangement of the (Congress) township, and instructing the volunteers, Mahadev wrote :

“It seems he is having the superb experience of ‘to day is my life's aim fulfilled’. . . . He had thought of putting up Gandhiji in a stately palace, but gave up the idea on the ground that Gandhiji himself might not like it, and has constructed

instead . . . beautiful Khadi-Kutir (a cottage made of Khadi).
 . Rajagopalachari has a delicate constitution and arrangement has been made for him in a separate small house; spacious beautiful bungalows have been provided for Sarojini, Dr Annie Besant, Messrs. Das and Nehru. As for the Maulanas, the Khilafat Committee has made the arrangements. Kakasaheb Kalelkar has taken the responsibility of the conservancy department and of arranging for people singing *bhajans* for Gandhiji."³⁷

Mahadev then wrote about the 'inner purity' of the Belgaon Congress. And naturally Gandhiji's competence was what he remembered, "It is four days since we came here, but hardly a single hour can be said to have been wasted. And it may be added that no preceding Congress session can claim to have done so much work. Is there any wonder that Gandhiji should start such an auspicious quick march, when he hopes to make the country reach a new high in the output of work and excellence of discipline?" Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who wrote the *History of the Congress*, said about it, "In the history of non-co-operation Belgaon is a landmark."³⁸ But he had not given as vital a description of that session as Mahadev had done. In one paragraph Mahadev gave a diary of all the four days. Then commented on Gandhiji's address:

"Those who read Gandhiji's presidential address as also those who read his tense expressions on the 20th and 21st night have marvelled at some peculiar contradictions between the two. But as a matter of fact there was no inconsistency. Each was a complement of the other. Severe restraint in expression perhaps too severe and extraordinary was the chief feature of the presidential address. There was resplendence but no scalding heat, perfect logic but no emotion. But in his exuberance on the 20th and 21st all these restrained traits of excellence came out like rabbits from a magician's hat."³⁹

Mahadev's power of objective exposition had combined with his devotion in the above comments. This is not the place to give the interesting report of the Belgaon Congress. Let us only examine the last para about the session. This revealed Mahadev's capacity to examine history, to bring alive important incidents in a few words, but it is Mahadev's devotion to Gandhiji which takes precedence.

"The impressions this Congress left on the mind were different from those that other Congress sessions usually produced. It did so, at least, in my mind. We felt ourselves on the top of the world when we returned from the Calcutta and Nagpur sessions. Fate was against me and I could not be present at the Ahmedabad session, but I know that the

exultation there was even wilder and one was reminded of the Sanskrit line : 'पीत्वा मोहमयी प्रमादमदिरा उन्मत्तभूत जगत्' (The world reeled in mad hilarity, after copious draughts of the wine of infatuation) At the Gaya session, while one section was smarting under defeat, the other was inebriated with triumph. After the Cocanada session, Congressmen were proud at the thought that they had achieved unity once again and were full of hopes for the future. From that hope arose our other hopes of finding ourselves again under the safe shelter of Gandhiji's presence in our midst. This hope was fulfilled, but by God's grace only, not by our efforts. But unity remained a distant, unrealised dream. Chastened by these experiences, our mind refuses to feel elated even at the success achieved at the Belgaon Congress. It was impossible for the Congress delegates to remain unaffected by the supernatural joy of the atmosphere, when they saw the ethereal sight which the second day's session of the Congress presented and heard the angelic voice which said in effect, 'Bury all your differences and dissensions right here, embrace your opponents with love.' But though they felt that joy, it may have been mixed with another feeling. 'Only the speaker, not we, have the capacity to love the opponent. We have yet to make our hearts capable of cherishing that loftiness of love.' Since there was not that love, many may have felt, 'But our hearts are so dry.' How apposite is the English idiom, 'Bury the hatchet.' Not only should we bury our quarrels of the past, as well as the painful recollections that may follow in their wake, but we should also bury 'the hatchet' itself, the instruments that caused these quarrels, viz., our unforgiving memory which poisons the mind. That, in substance, was the message Gandhiji gave at the end of his speech. That message wants both the Pro-changers and the No-changers to be humble and make great preparations for the future."⁴⁰

We will not go into the details of the many points discussed in the session as well as in private talks. Mahadev did not tire in describing those points. His devotion is evident in the following excerpt :

"When one thinks of his infinite resourcefulness and tact, combined with his constant concern for propriety, and of his light-hearted flashes of wit and humour followed by deeper notes of love that welled forth unexpectedly at times — for instance his references to his inordinate love for Pandit Jawaharlal and Miss Gulnar, one cannot help exclaiming 'Everything is extraordinary about this man.'"⁴¹

Mahadev's mind, at times, flew to Gujarat even when he was noting down every word of Gandhiji in his diary, as he sat in the Khadi-Kutir, or watched Gangadharrao spraying red dust while riding a horse. Finding a couple of minutes even from such a load of work, he gossiped with Vallabhbhai or Jivatram. Many of the personalities of the Congress fed him with enough material about Vallabhbhai. Mahadev would laugh uproariously at that, but he would only refer to Gandhiji's humour. Rajaji, even with his delicate health, gave an intellectual angle to this humour and laughter. But if any telegraph-man was seen bringing a telegram to Gandhiji's Khadi-Kutir, Mahadev's heart used to miss a beat.

At last, that fortunate moment for which Mahadev had been waiting for months had arrived. Gandhiji stood up to proceed to the stage to give his Presidential address in the open session of the Congress. Mahadev might have praised Gandhiji's nature of restraint and self-control, nevertheless, he considered this moment as indeed glorious and the slight smile on his face betrayed the unbounded joy in his heart.

That very moment a volunteer came running with a telegram and once again Mahadev missed a heart-beat. With almost a trembling hand he signed the slip, glanced at Gandhiji climbing the stage and then looked at the telegram. That day Mahadev did not have the patience to wait to open the telegram till the end of Gandhiji's address.

One piece of joy was Gandhiji occupying the Presidential Chair, the next piece of joy was in the telegram, brought by the volunteer. From far off Gujarat Mahadev's brother-in-law, Dr. Praggi, wired from their village the news that Durgaben had delivered a son on 24th December, at 6 a.m. under the care of her mother Vijayaben and elder sister Maniben. The son weighed 6½ lbs. and both the mother and son were doing well.

Mahadev could not contain his happiness. A few tears of joy must have mingled with the ink for Bapu's notes. The most important reason for his happiness was the last sentence of the telegram. Three years earlier Durgaben had her first delivery, and she delivered a dead daughter. She had only a glance at the peaceful dead body of the girl before the baby's maternal uncle took it away. But till her own death Durgaben kept on remembering that flower-like child, "She was just like your father, beautiful and long", she said. At that time Mahadev wrote only one sentence from Shakespeare to his Bengali mother, Urmiladevi Sen, "Love's Labour Lost." That was why Mahadev had been worried for months, but not to the extent of going to Gujarat by taking leave from Bapu. The

love between Mahadev and Durga was like the male and female of *chakva-chakvi* each sitting on opposite banks of a river.

Exactly sixty-six years after this day the main character of that telegram repeatedly turned the pages of Mahadevbhai's Diary of 24-12-1924 and a couple of days following it, out of curiosity and wonder There was no mention at all of the birth of a son !

Mahadev's diary had fused in Gandhiji's diary.

FOOTNOTES :

1. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi" - IV, p. 254
2. Ibid, pp. 308 to 314, selected
3. Ibid, last two lines, p. 269
4. Ibid, pp. 271 to 274, selected
5. Ibid, p. 274
6. Ibid, pp. 275-76
7. Ibid, p. 276
8. Ibid, pp. 276-79, 280-81
9. Verrier Elwin, "Mahadev" in *Gandhiji - 75 Years*, p. 15
10. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 285
11. Ibid, V, p. 26
12. Ibid, p. 87
13. Ibid, pp. 21-22
14. Ibid, IV, p. 155
15. Ibid, pp. 169-70
16. Ibid, pp. 158-59
17. Ibid, p. 157
18. Ibid, p. 161
19. Ibid, p. 167
20. Ibid, p. 179
21. Ibid, p. 236
22. Ibid, p. 62
23. *CWMG* - 24, p. 86
24. *CWMG* - 23, p. 498
25. Ibid, pp. 475-76
26. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 161
27. Ibid, p. 150
28. *M. D.'s Diary* - 18 (Guj) pp. 181-82
29. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 128
30. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", V, p. 17
31. Ibid, p. 21
32. *CWMG* - 23, p. 258 (footnote)
33. Verrier Elwin, "Mahadev", *Gandhiji - 75 Years*, p. 15
34. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", IV, p. 100
35. Ibid, p. 131
36. Ibid, V, pp. 59-60
37. Ibid, pp. 60-61

- 38 Ibid, p. 61
- 39. Ibid, p. 62
- 40. Ibid, pp. 88-89
- 41 Ibid, p. 82

CHAPTER XXVI

TRADING IN PUREST GOLD

As Congress President Gandhiji toured the whole country in 1925. Hardly any other Congress President before him had toured to such an extent for implementing the main resolution passed by the Congress. He spent almost the whole of 1926 in the Sabarmati Ashram and in 1927 he once again travelled to many places in the country. Mahadev was with him for almost all the time during these three years, he noted down the various activities of Gandhiji and informed the world about them through *Navajivan* and *Young India* as appropriate.

From the point of view of the strategy of the freedom struggle these years were not very significant, but they were none the less important. This is seen from Mahadev's regular notes and articles. Two aspects of this non-violent freedom struggle distinguished it from others. Firstly, side by side with the conflicts and along with opposing injustice, a positive aspect was coming up that the country was getting an opportunity of preparing an alternative system. The second aspect was that this struggle was sowing the seeds of a new society.

For the leader and some of his colleagues, the struggle was as much a development of inner virtues as it was an opposition to injustice. For the workers as well as the masses, it stressed the ethical and spiritual values. If a comprehensive picture is taken into account, before Gandhiji entered the Indian arena — or in the latter part of the 19th century — the country was more or less surrounded by *tamas* (darkness and ignorance); in which the struggle for freedom brought in a touch of *rajas* (passion and pride). The new weapon of Satyagraha, shown by Gandhiji, lent an aura of *satva* (purity).

In this happening the important movements which were taken up off and on, did bring an unparalleled awakening, but the difficult work of maintaining enthusiasm, and keeping it firmly implanted,

was done through constructive work. Unfortunately the leaders of the country did not pay much attention to constructive work. Thus Gandhiji's dream of getting Purna Swarajya quickly through constructive work remained only a dream. However, Gandhiji and some of his selected colleagues did not neglect constructive work. They gave considerable time during the last twenty years of the freedom-struggle to constructive work, and some of his colleagues dedicated their whole lives only to the constructive work programme.

After the Champaran Satyagraha and the constructive work done there, the three years from 1925 to 1927 were the first opportunity for Gandhiji and Mahadev to take interest in this programme. Gandhiji's work was to remove the people's inertia and inspire them to engage themselves in constructive work, and Mahadev's task was to explain the hidden beauty of Gandhiji's activities and to comprehensively and methodically place it before the people.

For Mahadev this project was also an instrument to express his love. He used to express his devotion, respect and love towards Gandhiji through his service and that expression lay in reducing himself to a zero and mingling into Gandhiji's personality. On the 8th June 1927, Gandhiji, in a message for *World's Youth*, a periodical, wrote :

"Truth and love have been jointly the guiding principle of my life. If God who is undefinable can be at all defined, then I can say that God is TRUTH. It is impossible to reach Him, that is, TRUTH, except through love. Love can only be expressed fully when man reduces himself to a cipher."¹

Actually for Mahadev that precisely was his life's aim but it could be applied with greater emphasis during this period when he was all the time with Gandhiji.

"Wherever I go, You are with me,
You lead me by holding my hand "

Mahadev could gladly sing this song by the Saint Poet, Tukaram, with reference to Gandhiji. Gandhiji continued in the above message, "This process of reduction to a cipher is the highest effort a man or a woman is capable of making, and it is possible only through ever-increasing self-restraint."²

Mahadev had not only made a neat copy of this message and sent it to Geneva, but took its gist to heart. That's why his whole life could be dedicated to the greatest *purushartha* of becoming a zero.

Let us examine the main incidents of these three years from Gandhiji's point of view.

Gandhiji had agreed to become the Congress President to save that organisation from being divided. Within a few days from the

time he took over that responsibility at Belgaon, the Congress members realised clearly that the new President was no utopian idealist, but was a practical and efficient worker, ready to successfully accomplish any task he undertook by exerting himself to the full. Most of the resolutions passed at Belgaon related to the constitution of the Congress, some were to satisfy different groups holding diverse views. But the resolution relating to the work for the entire Congress was the one that Gandhiji considered the main one. That resolution was about the threefold constructive work programme of Khadi, Removal of Untouchability and Hindu Muslim Unity. Gandhiji toured the whole country for it. Within the first four months of his Presidentship he visited Kathiawad, Delhi, Gulbarga in Karnataka, Kohat in the North-West, Lucknow in the United Provinces, Shahjahanpur, Allahabad, Calcutta, and Jabalpur in Central Provinces and Varad. During the previous years he was guiding the Vycom Satyagraha from a distance, but at this point of time he went to Kerala and took stock of the situation. Then he revisited South India, Bengal, Bihar, the United Provinces and Kathiawad. He went and stayed for a few days at the Wardha Ashram with Vinoba and Jammalalji.

In January 1925 Gandhiji attended 'Kaliparaj Conference' at Vedchhi in the Surat District. And in the same month he attended an All Party Conference, convened for Hindu-Muslim unity. In the beginning of February he met in Rawalpindi, the refugees from Kohat in the North-West. He toured Saurashtra in the same month. During these days there, a sharp difference arose between Gandhiji and Mohammed Ali regarding the situation in Kohat.

In 1925 Gandhiji had toured Bengal at length from May to August. Then he chaired a Congress Committee meeting at Patna in September. The All India Spinners' Association was founded there in the same month through a Congress resolution. He toured Bihar till the second week of October. Then he went to the U.P. and attended the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Sitapur. From October 22nd to November 4th he toured Kutch, where he had bitter experience of untouchability. In November he went to Sabarmati Ashram for some time and thereafter went to Wardha. In December he handed over the Presidential crown to Sarojini Naidu at the Kanpur Congress. Mahadev compared the Belgaon Congress Session under Gandhiji's Presidentship to the Kanpur Congress Session with Sarojini Devi as its President. He described the former as Diwane Aam and the latter as Diwane Khaas.

Gandhiji felt extremely fatigued on account of this constant travelling. Besides, some perversities had been discovered in the students at Sabarmati Ashram. To atone for this lapse, he fasted in

November for seven days. To attend to the Ashram problems personally, to give some rest to the body, he did curtail his activities outside the Ashram during 1926; but interviews in the Ashram, writing for *Navajivan* and *Young India* and heavy correspondence continued. In September he went to Bombay to receive a delegation from South Africa. In October he made a will and donated whatever assets he had to the Ashram. This was done on the 26th October 1926. Mahadev was one of the Trustees of the Ashram, but Gandhiji himself was not.

In 1925 he had emphasised on the threefold constructive work programme but in 1927 Gandhiji had begun a long tour for the propagation and the sale of Khadi.

In the beginning of 1928 a session of the Working Committee of 'International Fellowship', an organisation for peace, was convened at the Sabarmati Ashram. On the 23rd April, Gandhiji's nephew and his matchless colleague, Maganlal Gandhi died at Patna after a brief illness. To Gandhiji the news of the death of Maganlal Gandhi, who was almost the 'breath of the Ashram', proved to be a tremendous shock.

A delegation from the British Government, under the leadership of Sir John Simon, came to Bombay in 1928 to investigate the background for an Indian Constitution. There was not a single Indian member in the delegation. The Congress decided to reject the Simon Commission. All over country there were demonstrations against it. Police attacked the peaceful demonstrators. Gandhiji announced his support to the rejection of the Commission. In one of these demonstrations on the 30th October, the police repeatedly hit Lala Lajpatrai, the Lion of Punjab, in the chest with the stock of a musket. Lalaji died on the 17th November.

During this time Gandhiji's much talked of book, *Nitinashne Marge* (On the Path to Destruction of Ethics) was published. The *History of the Satyagraha in South Africa* was published in serial form in *Navajivan*. It was translated into English by Valji Govindji Desai. The English translation of Gandhiji's autobiography was published later. Its first instalment was published in *Young India*. Mahadev did this translation. The translation of the Chapters 29 to 43 of the fifth part was done by Pyarelal. Mahadev must have left the translation unfinished as he was involved in the work of the Bardoli Inquiry Commission. Gandhiji's devotee Miss Madalein Slade, who had recently come from England, looked through Mahadev's translation. Gandhiji had given the name Mira to Miss Slade. She lived in the Satyagraha Ashram as one of the Ashramites just like the others. Shrinivas Shastri also scrutinised the English translation of autobiography. Today *The Story of My Experiments*

with *Truth*, the English rendering of the original in Gujarati has been translated into many languages of the world.

Gandhiji re-organised the Gujarat Vidyapith and Mahadev was invited along with other distinguished people to become its member.

Having taken a bird's eye-view of Gandhiji's main activities from Belgaon to Bardoli, we will now take a closer look at Mahadev's attitudes and activities.

Mahadev's attitude of separating the grain from the chaff in matters of thought, noted down from various conversation, can be appreciated. But at times those notes reflected Mahadev's heart in words spoken by others. Mahadev's basis was that of a reporter and not that of an adviser and yet he used the opportunity to say what he wanted to. We have referred to the meeting with Rabindranath Tagore's elder brother at Shantiniketan. An excellent article about Barodada appeared in the issue of 24th January 1926 after Barodada's demise on 19th January 1926. There is a paragraph in that article in which Mahadev explained the working of his own mind in Barodada's words :

"Our co-operation with the Government is the co-operation of the stork with the fox who invited him to dinner . . . We all know Gandhi acts from the higher plane which is free from *kāma* and *krodha* and other passions. He is not lusting for war. Every one of his actions is actuated by *ahimsa*. He does nothing in excitement, nothing in the heat of the moment . . . not even a thing which is approved of by all. We should, therefore, throw in our lot wholeheartedly in his pure, unsullied, holy endeavour. My faith is unshaken that it is impossible to find in this *Kaliyuga* (iron age) a man of the sterling worth of Gandhiji. Why not make the best use of that pure gold ?"

To Mahadev as well, Gandhiji's service was like a transaction in cent per cent pure gold.

Similarly Vinoba's explanation about purity on the morning of 13th January 1926 also echoes Mahadev's inner self. "(In the Gita) That *yogi* is the best even among *yogis* who worships Me with faith, who keeps Me ever in his heart and adores Me. Thus a *yogi* also has got to be a *bhakta* (devotee). The prevalent belief that even without any healthy change in our actions in life, our *mukti* is certain through devotion is a mistaken one . . . devotion is impossible without *dhruti*. . . . The characteristics of 'a man of steadiness in experiential knowledge' (*sthita-prajña*) are given in Canto II. Those of the *yogi* are then given and then of the man of spiritual wisdom. But the *bhakta* is the crown of the all. *Bhakti* without renunciation is neither *bhakti* nor *yoga*. In consonance with the Lord's saying (Gita Discourse 7, Verse 8) 'I am the manliness in men' (मैरूपं मयुः) There

must be the evidence of courage in *bhakti* also"⁴ And Mahadev believed that anything of supreme value could be attained easily through the practice of austerity, and therefore, serving Gandhiji day and night had become as easy for him as did the service of Rama by Laxman.

To stay constantly with Gandhiji meant travelling regardless of day or night. For Mahadev, throughout the year, the day became longer and the night shorter, because his day began a bit earlier to that of Gandhiji and ended a bit later.

Another duty of constantly staying with Gandhiji was to try to prevent the rush of his visitors and to carry as much burden as possible of his correspondence. Thus Mahadev's devotional valour had been evident in sleeplessness, roaming around, and by prolific writing. During the South India tour Mahadev, worried about Gandhiji, described the hustle and bustle and unconsciously related his own exertion therein:

"From Trichur to Palghat. What a terrible strain a journey on these roads means, has not been told. But only today's itinerary, given by way of a specimen, will show what kind of a tour this one in South India was. Early at 4.30 a.m., meeting at Paarur, then to Aslwar by car; 3 meetings there, then at 11 a.m. by train to Trichur, meeting with the Maharaja, procession and 2 meetings there; start for Palghat at 3 p.m., reaching there at 7.30 p.m. by a motor ride along the roughest possible hilly road; an extremely ill-organised public meeting there in the jostle of the crowds, it was 8 p.m. when Gandhiji could reach the rostrum! — torrential rain; women's meeting at 9 p.m., theological debate of *pandits*, from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m., visit to the Sabari Ashram of Krishnaswami Iyer, 2 a.m.; rest at the station at last at 2.30 a.m. This is the relentlessly non-stop programme of 22 hours in one day, but there were many such in the Southern tour. This instance has been given only to show what amount of work people take from Gandhiji."⁵

On 15th February 1925 Thakoresaheb of Rajkot gave an address in honour of Gandhiji. The note that Mahadev wrote after Gandhiji's reply points out one more difficulty of his already difficult work:

"It is impossible to give a completely faithful account, both of the speech that Gandhiji delivered in reply and the atmosphere he conjured up at the time. The man who would prefer to note down every word was certain to fail in catching the atmosphere and the man, who thought he would rather do the latter and hence decide not to note down every word, was equally certain to drop from his report some of the invaluable

expressions uttered in that speech. The reporter of Gandhiji's speeches is thus often put in the position of *trishanku* who is neither here on earth nor there in the heavens."⁶

Thus for Mahadev this work of years might not have made headlines in the newspapers, but it can certainly be described as a result of his 'devotional valour'.

Gandhiji himself had nurtured this valour. At the end of his innumerable letters Gandhiji wrote, "You will get the rest of the news from Mahadev. Moreover, he wrote in many of his articles, 'the reader must hope for detailed description from Mahadev'." When noting some important event during a tour, Gandhiji at times wrote, "Mahadev would take up writing the notes about the interesting events of the place." Thus there was very little chance of Mahadev's work lessening because Gandhiji did a lot of hard work. It was also true that Gandhiji could do double the amount of his usual work because of Mahadev's apprenticeship. It could be said that this pair was like a pair in cricket, which was doing very well. When one batsman was indulging in stroke-play from one end, the other gave a stand to his partner by keeping his own wicket. At times it must have been difficult for Mahadev's active pen to give such a silent stand. He once wrote after one of the South Indian tours: "Gandhiji has written an article on Kanyakumari. I have, therefore, lost the chance to give my pen a free flight of fancy in the description of the place." But how could Mahadev let go the opportunity to show his own ingenuity? In the next sentence he wrote "But may I be presumptuous enough to add a touch or two to the picture Gandhiji has drawn? Gandhiji says that Kashmir and Hindukush form the crown of the goddess that is Mother India. But I, for one, regard Mt. Kailas (the abode of Lord Siva) as her crest. There is wonderful propriety in thus installing Siva, the Lord of Kailas, at the head and making that Virgin, Kanyakumari Uma, — who conquers even Lord Siva himself — sit at the lotus feet of Mother Bharat. That apart . . . when you touch the feet of Mother India as well as when you reach her head, one and the same quality of moral grandeur — that of *tapasya* — gleams upon your mental sight."⁷ Continuing the cricket metaphor, is not it something like Tendulkar out-scoring Azharuddin whilst giving him a stand? To give support to Gandhiji's description, his thoughts, his words of ancient culture and nourishing it with poetic imagination and adding richness to it was almost Mahadev's daily work. However great a genius he might have been, Mahadev's humility and devotion made him believe his place was not by the side of the Lord of Kailas, but with Uma touching Mother India's feet near Kanyakumari. And so as if complaining about the comforts he received during the Bengal tour, he wrote

"Let me admit that my friend Shri Shankarlal and I had frightened the organisers of Gandhiji's tour in Bengal, because we were alarmed at the fact that he had caught fever from the strenuous tour programmes in Kathiawar and Gujarat. But the warning has done no harm. Satishbabu took every possible care to see that Gandhiji kept up his health. If anything, he erred on the side of excess, in that he provided a first class ticket for even a coolie like myself."⁸

But there was another side to this hospitality. During the same Bengal tour Mahadev wrote to Devdas from Dinajpur in a letter on 21st May 1925 :

"I am writing this sitting in a car. I am waiting for Bapu's arrival after taking food. I will try to write as much as possible till he comes. Today both Kripalani and myself were badly insulted. We were pushed out by a car-driver with the words, "Why have you to go where ever Mahatmaji goes?" . I am writing about this insult just for your information, not as a complaint . . . Moreover, even the importance we get is not deserved, just as the insult also was not deserved. Yesterday we were at the Palace of the Maharaja of Mymensing. It was like the Travancore Palace. We all had separate bed-rooms! I lunched with the Maharaja and all of us were photographed! And the whole tour was by first class with Bapu. Do I deserve all this? But that was the training for holding alike pleasure and pain, and respect and insults."⁹

The very fact that Mahadev combined the twenty eighth verse of the second discourse and eighteenth verse of the twelfth discourse of the Gita was indicative of the mingling of the ascetic and the devotee in his personality. Describing such bitter sweet experience of Bengal, Mahadev asked Devdas a question in the same letter :

"How should I give the pictures of Bengal to you? Can I describe them in *Navajivan* or *Young India*? There is a big handicap in *Young India*! Bapu would be writing about the same thing. So I would write quite often after reading what Bapu wrote. And now I have been stuck with writing every week for *Young India*. Do you like it? I am not comfortable writing in that foreign language. . . ."¹⁰

In November 1927 Gandhiji went to Ceylon. The objective of that tour was to spread the message of Khadi and collect money for Khadi. But according to his characteristics Gandhiji covered many other subjects in his interviews and talks. Mahadev was with him on this tour. His descriptions about the Ceylon tour have been published in his book, *With Gandhiji in Ceylon*. The reports of the Ceylon tour

can be considered as unique in the descriptions of reports on public men.

Gandhiji had refused invitations to visit Finland, America and China. Gandhiji's reasoning regarding these refusals was that it was futile to preach non-violence abroad if there was not a concrete example of it in the country. The invitation to Finland had come from Romain Rolland and friends. Some friends in India also thought that travel abroad would be good for Gandhiji's health. So for a long time he kept on thinking about it. Whenever he thought about travel abroad, he always expected that Mahadev would go with him.

In 1926 when Gandhiji remained primarily in the Sabarmati Ashram, he took the Gita classes for the Ashramites from the 24th February to the 3rd November. In the same year he conducted the Bible classes on every Saturday from July in Gujarat Vidyapith. The notes of the Gita classes were taken down by Punjabhai, an Ashramite and Mahadev. During these Gita classes Gandhiji spoke, specially for those Ashramites who had not gone deep into the meaning of words and thoughts of the Gita. During these lectures he once or twice mentioned that Mahadev knew more than himself about the pronunciation and meaning of the Sanskrit words. Mahadev took the notes of these lectures with as much devotion as he did of other lectures. He could not take the notes of all the lectures as he had to be away occasionally and he did not get time to edit it and get it published as a book, even later on. It was after his death that Narahari with the help of Punjabhai's notes got the lectures published as a book.

All the readers of *Navajivan* were not devotees of Gandhiji like Mahadev, and even if they respected Gandhiji there were readers who got bored with Mahadev's descriptions of tours. Gandhiji wrote, referring to one such reader :

"The fact that Shri Mahadev Desai gives a diary of my tours should not be a cause of complaint. My tours are not for my pleasure but for service. Hence, readers have a right to know their impact and it is my duty to report it in some form or other. It is indeed a fault of Mahadev's diary that it often praises me. That, however, seems to be inevitable. My secretary who travels along with me and who works as my slave can hardly be my critic. What inspires him to accompany me can be only love or a sort of fascination. He is not tempted by a salary. I can exercise restraint on his praises but I cannot altogether prevent these. If the good opinion of those who are my close associates does not swell my head with pride, I would rather look upon it as a burden and make special efforts to be worthy

of it As long as I do so, this praise is not likely to prove harmful."¹

Nobody need believe that Mahadev's praise was limited to Gandhiji alone. He was charmed if he met any thorough gentleman. If he spent some time with any such person he could not resist praising that person in his weekly periodicals. If someone like Vinoba came from Wardha or Gandhiji went to Wardha from Sabarmati to meet Vinoba, or Mahadev had to travel with Sardar or Rajaji, he would report on it with sincerity in *Navajivan* or *Young India*. Occasionally, even if an insignificant person showed devotion to Gandhiji, Mahadev would mention it in his report.

During the Bengal tour both Gandhiji and Mahadev came in very close contact with Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. On his insistence both of them stayed with Dasbabu from the third to fifth June. On 17th June Gandhiji received the news of the sad demise of Deshbandhu. Gandhiji attended his *shraddha* ceremony. He consoled the family by staying with them. He extended his Bengal tour by some months and collected funds from the whole country for Deshbandhu's memorial. The article Mahadev wrote after Deshbandhu's passing away was like a tribute from one devotee to another. Thousands of Bengalis must have been charmed by that article. Urmiladevi, Deshbandhu's sister had already established Mahadev as the eldest son in her family. The relationship of the two families — Urmiladevi's and Mahadev's — long remained close after Mahadev's death. After Urmiladevi died her son and daughter-in-law, Jiten and Kalyani Sen, maintained the same relationship with Narayan and Uttara.

In the article written in the memory of the Deshbandhu, Mahadev had quoted a *bhajan*, one of the many poems composed by Deshbandhu indicating similar attitude towards devotion. "Never mind if I cannot have Your *darshan* but keep the craving, to see You, alive ' That, craving alive, would be enough for me " Mahadev gave the gist of the *bhajan* in the above sentence and quoting the *bhajan* in its original Bengali language he noted, "His perpetual effort was to keep alive the eternal thirst for freedom and till it came, the eyes were to be eternally moist for Swaraj " This sentence indicates Mahadev's belief that the craving and effort for attaining God and for attaining freedom were the same.

During the entire period Gandhiji kept Mahadev with him. If he had to go anywhere he would intimate beforehand so that Mahadev could accompany him. He would send Mahadev to some place where he himself would have wanted to go but couldn't go due to pressure of work. Occasionally Mahadev was sent for public duties and at times even for personal service. In May 1926 Devdas had to

be operated for appendicitis in Bombay and Gandhiji sent Kasturba and Mahadev to take care of all arrangements and nursing.

Mahadev's work with Gandhiji increased in Devdas's absence. Mathuradas Trikamji expressed concern about it. Gandhiji wrote in his reply :

"Since Devdas is not here, Mahadev has obviously more work to do. Friendship does not mean service at your own convenience. If he cannot go over there Mahadev should bear the inconvenience on account of Devdas's absence. As for Devdas he has nothing to lose if his stay there is prolonged. Only through service comes spiritual elevation."¹²

One incident about leaving Gandhiji for a few hours had become quite known because of Kakasaheb's pen. Kakasaheb had recalled this incident years later and unconsciously so was slightly unjust in that description towards Gandhiji. This was the incident :

On the 14th August 1927 (Kakasaheb has written 1926) Gandhiji and his entourage had reached Shimoga during their Mysore tour. During this tour Kakasaheb and others did go to see places of interest in that region. Mahadev also joined them occasionally if there was not too much work. An excellent teacher of geography and a person who has enjoyed wandering for the whole life, Kakasaheb remembered on reaching Shimoga that the Jog Falls — also known as Gairsappa — which he had dreamt to see since childhood was on the river Sharavati in district Shimoga. Kaka created the atmosphere to go there. Rajaji, Devdas, Gangadharrao, and Maniben got ready to go with Kakasaheb. Mahadev refused their invitation. Kakasaheb has described in his book *Bapu-ni-Jankhi*, that Bapu asked Mahadev not to go.¹³ 'But in the note of that day in the diary Mahadev had said that he himself refused to go.'¹⁴ Then Kakasaheb must have used Gandhiji as the trump-card where Gandhiji said and Kakasaheb noted, "Mahadev will not come. I am his Gairsappa." In that a hint of pride was evident on Gandhiji's part. But Mahadev felt that he got 'unearned praise' in what Gandhiji said about him. His entire note is as follows :

"I got this unearned praise because I refused to go to Gairsappa on the 15th

"He told Raja, 'When Mahadev himself feels like that he should be encouraged.' Then added, 'He does not have any separate existence from me. He should see what I see — not anything more. This is not his criticism. But if everyone acts in this way it would be unfortunate. One or even two Mahadevs are necessary — one is definitely so. If it is not height of arrogance, I would say — I am Mahadev's Gairsappa Falls.'"¹⁵

The decisive factor in this incident was that it was the day for

preparing and posting the matter for *Young India*. If the matter was not posted that day, *Young India* would not be published on time. Both Mahadev and Gandhiji were concerned about that.

Kakasaheb, no doubt, recorded years later, that Gandhiji had requested the Dewan of Mysore to arrange for Mahadev's trip to Gairsappa when Mahadev went to Mysore some years after the above incident occurred.

Mahadev had to note down every incident while moving rapidly with Gandhiji. At one place he recorded as if he was left far behind. "Our tour is so rapid that I cannot cope up with the programme if I try to note down as many incidents as possible. I am writing this from Khandesh. But Khamgam of Varad still remain(ed)."¹⁵ Both Khandesh and Varad are neighbouring areas. And during that tour Gandhiji went only to Malkapur from Khamgam. Mahadev had failed to write only about one place, the last one visited, and still it disturbed him. An important reason for Mahadev's efficiency was his habit of doing the work at the very time it came so as to keep up with the load, which Gandhiji's speed in working could create.

These notes included not only where Gandhiji went, how many meetings he addressed and whom he met, but the gist of most of the speeches, some addresses in their entirety, a couple of lines from others, a slight reference about some talks, a lively description of interviews dealing with incoming and outgoing post and Mahadev did not leave out from his notes the history, geography, political, social and economic condition of any new place they visited. Even during the time when he was the bank supervisor, before coming to Gandhiji, he always described the social condition of the place where the bank was located along with his usual report. How could he not do likewise when he had the company of a person like Gandhiji and a public like the readers of *Navajivan* and *Young India*?

Gandhiji was not the only one whose speeches were reported. Mahadev cared more for those for whom Gandhiji had regards. He would indeed report their speeches to the people. Sometimes he came across some people who were difficult to report. Sarojini Naidu's lectures were indeed very nice to listen to, but her powerful language was difficult to translate. Mahadev escaped from reporting her lectures at the 'Dewan-e-Khas' Congress at Kanpur by declaring his inability to do so. "It is difficult for me to translate her speech, and any good translation worth the name would be hard for the masses to understand."¹⁶

Mahadev had some free time when he translated Morley's *On Compromise!* He did not have any when he heard Sarojinidevi's speech. He must have felt happy at getting the prize for the

translation of *On Compromise*, but he noted in his diary about the appreciation of his translation by the scholar, Keshav Harshad Dhruva, in spite of it being his own praise :

"(You have - he said) served the young men of Gujarat through *On Compromise*. The English book is difficult to understand for many. You have done something that the English have not been able to do. Your mastery of the language is such that even we can learn something, etc., etc. . . ." ¹⁷

Basically Mahadev had a literary mind and so whenever he got time he would read some excellent literature, or write something new. Doing this he wrote a brief introduction of the untouchable saint Nanda, the biography of St. Francis, a short story "Khadi-Kelan" ¹⁸ In the biography of Sant Tukaram he referred to his *abhangas* on the basis of lectures given in Vinoba's Ashram. One can easily understand that in the midst of all this work and all this travelling, the essential interest of his writings was that of steadfast devotion. The nectar which nourished him from within and without was the one described by saints like Narasinh Mehta in their moments of ecstasies. Although Mahadev lived in the company of great philosophers, philosophical discussions seemed insipid to him when compared with the everlasting sweetness of devotion.

But Gandhiji's love was not sentimental. It was a love for which you had to stake your life. He exclaimed on witnessing love of the people of Kathiawad .

"But I want something still greater from you, something that is exceptionally sublime. It may happen that your love may make me even unhappy. If you do not carry out your promise in action, this love may even kill me instead of putting fresh life into me. And what would happen to the relationship between us if that love was not translated into action? That relationship is a public affair, not a private one. It is for the purpose of serving you." ¹⁹

Mahadev constantly connected these references with himself and went on transforming his love for Gandhiji into service. Gandhiji had drawn out an ideal for his valour :

"One need never prescribe a limit to the extent of one's *purushartha* (effort both mental and spiritual). As there is no limit beyond which a man cannot fly in the sky above, so is there none to one's *purushartha*. There is the boundless sky above for one's ascent, but for descent, for a fall, there is a limit. God, Nature herself, has made those limits in the forms of earth, water, stone, etc." ²⁰

Whenever he had a little time Mahadev acquainted us with his continuing scholarly activities. During the Bengal tour he read the

biography of Tolstoy by Paul Burncock and gave comments on it along with some incidents and notable quotes. While travelling through Orissa Mahadev read *Thetse*, a novel by Anatole France, and gave some quotations which could be usefully applied in life. He also gave the gist of Kenopanishad on the basis of Vinoba's lecture.

During these three years Gandhiji and Mahadev had hardly ever been separated. Once Gandhiji himself insisted that Mahadev should go and observe the Khadi work at Madhubani in North Bihar. He knew that if Mahadev saw this he would give a vivid picture to the nation through his periodicals. Through Rajenbabu's or Kripalani's suggestion Mahadev was once made to preside over a students' conference in Bihar. The presidential address given on 30th January 1927 was rather an unusual part of his diary in which Mahadev had written his own speech. That speech was of a very high quality explaining Gandhiji's life and philosophy on the basis of the Gita.

Mahadev might not have stayed away from Gandhiji, but more than once, he has expressed his independent and clear opinions. He declared in a couple of sentences his opinion about Maulana Hasrat Mohani who opposed Gandhiji in an open session of the Congress. "He stood up to oppose knowing full well that nobody was going to listen to him. The Maulana evoked admiration for his courage though nothing but pity for his arguments."²¹ And then, "Maulana Mohammed Ali thrashed him soundly. It would have been an excellent speech, if it had been short, but when Maulana rises to speak specially to trounce somebody, you never know when he would end."²²

Regarding Balkoba Bhawe's speech about laxity among Ashram children, "It smacked to me of spiritual pride."²³ And about a known constructive work organisation of Bengal, " . . . the Ashram may have cultivated fearlessness more than politeness or love."²⁴

Mahadev did not spare even Gandhiji from his objective opinion. He wrote only one line about Gandhiji's speech at Faridkot on 2nd May 1925 during the Bengal tour, "(His) lecture was quite common." Might be that by 'common' was meant what he daily spoke.

Gandhiji had an interview with the Hindu refugees who had escaped from Kohat and then moved to Rawalpindi. At that time the Government did not give him permission to go to Kohat. In Rawalpindi he met the leaders of both the communities and also the masses. He cross examined some of the witnesses as he used to do in South African courts. He saw that Maulana did not cross examine Muslim witnesses and the questions he asked were only to cover up (their inadequacies)

In a letter to Narahari, of 6th December 1924, Mahadev almost forecast the coming dark days :

"Something unexpected has occurred here. Muslims came from Kohat and Bapu has understood the situation. He has got some important statements from three or four people. Yesterday there was such a strong deposition from a known person that Bapu said at night, 'I have done the most valuable work of the year.' From that deposition Gandhiji has got such excellent instances of Muslim mentality that he has got guidance for his work from those instances. The next point was that there could be sharp difference of opinion with Shaukat. That man has worked only as the advocate of Kohat Muslims. He is not going to see their fault indeed ! That means that there would not be a joint statement by Bapu and Shaukat and I am afraid that Bapu too might be very unfortunate if this happens. Because now Bapu has enough facts. Now if he does not decide, what can be expected from Bapu ? The entire Hindu population is very reasonably expecting a decision from Bapu, and it would get a shock if Bapu kept quiet. But why anticipate an evil ? Maybe everything will turn out all right.

"The situation in Kohat is so bad that it could not be described fully. Muslims drove away the Hindus and fought among themselves over the loot, and fought to such an extent that they were prepared to burn each other's house. The Government got what it wanted. The Government has taken bail amount of one and a half to two lac rupees from both sides. One section of the two, was prepared to give up. One man gave important and somewhat truthful deposition only because of this fight. But Shaukat was prepared to destroy this evidence too. Shaukat had never asked the Muslims any question on cross-examination, on the contrary as he started losing to Bapu, he went on asking leading questions to save those people. But more of this when we meet. . . ." ²⁵

The differences between Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali became public because of this incident. Mahadev proved right in that Mahadev's fear that Gandhiji may remain silent about his opinion proved wrong. Both Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali gave separate statements. In the Muslim League session at Bombay on 31-12-24, Zafarullakhan's resolution which was a more generous one, was cast aside, and Mohammed Ali's resolution was passed. Gandhiji, after reading it, wrote in a letter filled with pain, "I have read the resolution again and again, the more I read it, the more I dislike it." At the end he wrote "Yet you must hold on to it, if you don't feel that it is wrong. What I want to do is to act on your heart and

thereon (on) your head I am not going to desert you whilst I have faith in you."²⁶

As such Mahadev was hardly away from Gandhiji during this period. But it was possible that he occasionally went to Kalyawadi, Valsad and Sabarmati to see the tiny Babla. It was Mahadev who named him Narayan. Once Vinoba, out of curiosity, asked Mahadev, "What gave you the idea to name your son Narayan? Was it from that of the Manager of the Ashram or someone else?" Mahadev replied immediately: "I had given that name from the story of Ajamil. We are sinners like Ajamil. By calling the son Narayan if we could wash off some of our sins why should we not?"

Vinoba was touched by Mahadev's humility.

At one stage Mahadev went to Gujarat to be with Narayan and fell sick. Gandhiji was in Patna at that time. Once they were separated they had to write letters. Gandhiji wrote:

"You may or may not follow the other rules, you may or may not be in your senses but do write to me, you must, even if, you should be sitting on a stake. May this devotion bring you fruit. It is for the same reason that I too am even desirous of writing to you, but I am only an object of worship. How can I write so long as I do not become a devotee? Many an idol may be falling, whereas innumerable devotees have crossed over. Many attained *moksha* with the help of Krishna's name. But poor Krishna of the Mahabharata had to die without glory. For how could he have Krishna's name on his lips? Now tell me who is greater, the devotee or the object of devotion?"

"That you would fall ill I certainly knew. You must have recovered completely by now. Stay there without worrying at all. Let Durga be completely satisfied. I want you to observe one condition. Do not be bed-ridden. . . ."²⁷

Of course the rose that was Mahadev was touched by the heat of the sacrificial fire that was Gandhi. There was one incident which is now well known. The whole incident has been given from *Navajivan* with a view to indicating the working of Mahadev's mind in a delicate situation:

"As I am writing about the incident that happened today I am reminded of our (Gujarati) proverb, 'It is the scholar who errs and the swimmer who is drowned.' But I must add that I never make the proud claim of being a scholar and, as for swimming, I know less than nothing. All the same, is there any wonder, if I call myself the worst possible example of that proverb, 'the scholar errs etc.', when I suddenly forget the precept I hear day and night from Gandhiji? It is also the one that I myself am accustomed to put before everybody as well as

the one that a child can learn from the slightest acquaintance with Gandhiji ?

"Often in these columns have I repeated Gandhiji having said to various audiences on various occasions that our time is a trust. But the lesson was etched deep into my mind the other day, only when I myself happened to be the offender. I have often laughed at these people's expense. Let them laugh today at mine.

"Outwardly it is a story of how I began and ended the study of French. It is really a story of my own humiliation and shame — which is all the deeper, because, 'how much the more and the better thou knowest, so much the more rigorously shalt thou therefore be judged'. The desire of learning French had possessed me ever since I went to jail, but Urdu had rightly a better claim, especially when the opportunities of learning it were so great. And I knew that to learn Urdu or Hindustani, our lingua franca, was a duty, whilst the other was no more than 'a desire of knowing'. And yet the desire was there and raised its head whenever there was an opportunity. I saw one in the arrival at our Ashram of Miss Madeleine Slade and lost no time in seizing it. She had come to serve, to give and not to take, and the moment she said she would love to be of some service to me I expressed my desire to learn French. 'Certainly', she said and without the slightest thought I started on my study. The first lesson on the articles and simple verbs, was given, and I eagerly went for the second. To have learnt to understand sentences as *Ce motest tres difficile* and *Ce mot N'est pas si difficile* after only one day of study was a thing to be proud of. I asked my teacher whether Gandhiji knew that I had begun French. She said, he did and that 'he was amused and surprised'. 'Surprised' gave me a sort of alarm and I began to imagine in my mind what was coming. And scarcely had I finished the second lesson when the message came that I was wanted by Gandhiji.

"I went, of course, in fear and trembling, though hardly prepared for all that followed. There was some casual inquiry and I thought only my conscience had made a coward of me. But no. The storm came almost as soon as I had begun to reassure myself. 'So you have begun French?' he asked smiling, disguising all his indignation. I smiled an affirmative answer. 'I thought, when she was making the appointment with you yesterday, that you were going to her to give her a lesson in Hindi. But she told me this morning, as I asked her how she had spent her time, that she gave you a French lesson for an

hour. Do you know what I told her?" He asked still smiling 'Yes,' I said, 'she told me you were amused and surprised' 'Well then,' he said, 'I tell you what I said I said, 'Caesar aimed at the crown and failed' And then began a volley of questions 'What have you been learning French for? Because Miss Slade, French scholar, is here? Or you want to read Romain Rolland in French? Or to read our French correspondence?' 'No, I have been long waiting to learn French. French-knowing friends told me that it was easy to learn the language, and useful too' 'Well,' he said rather sternly now, 'do you know that all Englishmen do not know French, and the best of them are content to read the French authors in translations? And much of the best French literature is turned into English as soon as it is published' There was a pause for a minute or two 'How long do you think you will take to learn it?' 'About six months,' I told 'How many hours?' 'An hour each day' 'Regularly?' 'Yes' 'Do you think you can get an hour each day whilst we tour about?' 'Hardly, but I think I might snatch some time whilst actually travelling.' 'Indeed? Are you sure?' I hesitated 'And now that you want to learn French, I must keep you free each day for an hour, should I not?' This was more than I could bear. 'No,' said I energetically, 'you need not I shall find some time somehow' 'You will not find time,' he said, now driving the point home, 'you will steal time.' I was silenced 'Don't you think so?' he asked expecting a confession 'I do,' said I 'I could give to spinning all the time I give to French.' 'Yes, there are many other things But when we are engaged in a life and death struggle, how could you think of learning French? You may read as much French as you like after Swaraj But until then —'

" 'I stop it from today' I said expecting to be forgiven and allowed to go 'But that is not all' he said 'The charge-sheet is not yet over. Do you know that Miss Slade has come here, having burnt all her boats? Do you know that her sacrifice for our cause is greater than that of any of us? Do you know that she is here to learn and study and serve and give all her time to the service of our people and thereby her own people, and that nothing that happens at her own home will swerve her from her appointed task here? Every minute of her time is, therefore, doubly precious and it is for us to give her as much as we can. She wants to know every thing about us, she must master Hindustani How else is she to do it, unless we help her in making the best of her time? She may be quite

willing to oblige us, but our duty is to give her as much as we can. Our own time is sacred enough. Hers is a more sacred trust. Rather than indulge in the luxury of learning French, I would expect you to give her an hour in Hindi, Sanskrit, or such other thing.'

"Clearly there was no answer for me. I hung down my head in shame. My speechlessness was an eloquent confession of my blunder. Was there any penance I might make? It was unwise to ask him. It should suggest itself to me. But his unfailing kindness had already forgiven me and he himself suggested the penance. 'So again tomorrow at the same hour tell her your mistake, and take up reading Hindi hymns with her instead of French.'"²⁸

Later on when he had free time in jail Mahadev learnt French. On hearing about some such incident, Morarjibhai and Chandubhai once raised a point that Gandhiji gave ample justice to opponents, gave them his affection, but he was unjust to his own close colleagues by not giving them enough time. How could Gandhiji agree with this? He said, "I do not remember to have been unjust to my colleagues. They should desert me if they felt that I was not just with them." Mahadev said with a smile, 'Does a wife ever desert a husband?' and all laughed uproariously.²⁹

That relationship was also fostered by Gandhiji. In a letter written to Mahadev on 21st October 1925, he wrote:

"You are right. Whenever you have been ill, you have been away from me. The inference is terrible. Can't you stay without me? What about Durga then? Polak at times was in the same condition and I used to tell him that he had wedded two wives and that, too, even though the English Law allowed him to have only one." . . .³⁰

The fact was that it was impossible for Gandhiji and Mahadev to hide anything from each other.

Smt. Urmiladevi Sen, who had looked upon Mahadev as her son, wrote in an article of memoirs:

"Once a gentleman asked for private audience with Gandhiji. Mahadev and myself were sitting with him when that gentleman came. I got up from there. Whilst getting up I saw that gentleman looked a bit worried when he saw Mahadev still sitting there. Gandhiji said, 'If you do not want to talk in Mahadev's presence, you can go. Because even if he is not here, he will positively hear about your talk, from me.' Then added, 'Mahadev is my son, my brother, my friend, my secretary and my everything.' Hearing this for a minute I just

stood there. When I looked back whilst leaving I saw Mahadev smiling away."³¹

On the other side of the partnership could Mahadev keep a secret from Gandhiji? On 25th August 1927 Gandhiji wrote to Maniben Patel: ". Over a remark of mine Mahadev showed me your letter without waiting for your permission to do so. No one should expect Mahadev to keep any secrets from me. It is beyond his power."³²

Mahadev did not hide anything from Gandhiji. Everything from his innermost thoughts to all the information he gathered about the whole world from his diverse contact and extensive reading, he used to put before Gandhiji. Moreover, it was his own duty to present the world with all Gandhiji's internal and external activities and that had become his life's work.

During these years he gave to the world an insight into the various aspects of Gandhiji's personality. In order to appreciate Mahadev's life fully, we must come to know the personality of the one who he served. Let us consider some of Gandhiji's personal attributes.

In November 1925 Gandhiji went on a seven days' fast from the 24th of that month, on account of some lapses on the part of the Ashram children. For the whole year he stayed at the Ashram because of ill health, and in order to give more attention to the Ashram's way of working. Once when he became ill during a tour, he expressed a desire to either get better or to die at the Ashram. Once he had to break his weekly silence during a travel. Kasturba drew his attention to that. He atoned for it by fasting. During his Ashram stay as well as his incessant travelling during 1927 Gandhiji suffered from high blood pressure. Once he fainted whilst spinning. Thus we could know about his physical well being from the newspaper reports of that period. His thought processes were also available to us because of Mahadev's notes. During the Bengal tour, referring to a draft prepared by Mahadev, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das said to Mrs. Das: "What would have taken me 3 days to write, he finished in 15 minutes! And yet people refuse to regard him a politician! But the man who could make this draft must be a consummate politician."³³ This was an accolade given to one politician by another politician. But Deshbandhu gave a similar yet equally genuine commendation to Gandhiji after being close to him in the Bengal tour. He said to Satkoti Babu, a colleague and a follower: "Mark this Mahatma! He has no enemy and I have so many. What's the reason? Only now I understand that nobody does violence to the Mahatma, because there is no violence in his heart. I am sure my heart is filled with violence and that is why I have so

many enemies." ?³⁴ Whilst speaking before a Christian Society on "Brotherly Feeling in Every Man", Gandhiji, accepting Deshbandhu's above opinion said :

"I have often tried to see whether I am capable of hating — not of loving, but hating — anybody. And I must honestly and with due humility, say that I have never felt I can hate any human being. . . I cannot understand how I came by that state of mind But I speak only of what I have been practising all my life."³⁵

The root of Gandhiji's confidence was his faith in God. And normally, not only that but that he would accept the opposition's statements and also believe in the honesty of the opposition's motive. For India's freedom he was prepared to give up everything except Truth and Non violence. But for these two he was prepared to oppose the whole world single-handed. Thus though Gandhiji was the leader of non-co-operation, his basic attitude was to co-operate with the British to the maximum extent possible. When he said this at two meetings held in support of the British, they were so impressed that *The Statesman* and the *Englishman*, two Calcutta dailies wrote articles favouring Gandhiji having previously been critical of him.

His sense of humour was one of the reasons he could sustain himself in spite of a lot of mental and physical exertion. During a meeting with Rajaji or Vallabhbhai some jokes would necessarily be exchanged even in the most serious discussions. At times Gandhiji's humour was evident in his ready wit. A Parsi lady joked as she garlanded him in a meeting, "Sir, this garland is Indian." "It is fortunate," Gandhiji replied instantly, "that you have remained Indian to that extent."³⁶

During the two years of travel (1925 and 1927) Gandhiji's main attention was fixed on constructive work. In hundreds of meetings he spoke about Khadi, Removal of Untouchability and Hindu-Muslim unity in a number of different ways.

In the Kathiawad tour, immediately on his being the President of the Congress he became almost obsessed with Khadi and talked about it everywhere. Prabhashankar Pattani, the astute and intelligent Devan of Bhavnagar took a vow to put on Khadi for life and Gandhiji stayed as his guest for three days to teach him spinning. At some places he would explain the economics of spinning-wheel, the needs of the villages and to the number of free hours of the people. At one place he even said, "You cannot serve Pattani Saheb through the spinning-wheel, but if you want to serve the 26 lakhs of farmers (of Bhavnagar), you have no other go but to ply the wheel. Take these my words as written under the seal of Destiny."³⁷

Keeping in mind the importance of factories as insisted upon by a Communist leader, Saklatwala, Gandhiji spoke during the Varad (i.e. Vidarbha) tour, "If our whole country starts working in factories, we would have to search for other countries to suck us dry; quite possibly we might have to search for other planets."³⁸ Gandhiji has called the economic system of the West, based on profit, ownership, competition and exploitation an evil system.

Gandhiji said that the constructive programme was one to make the masses strong from within. "Removal of untouchability and communal unity are connected with emotions. But Khadi is a completely practical programme."

After the interviews with the Kohat refugees Gandhiji almost abandoned the question of communal unity. He was a bit disappointed and hurt about it, though he had not given up his faith in it.

In a meeting at Calcutta he confessed about his helplessness in the matter of communal unity. He could not speak in 1925 with as much confidence as he did during Khilafat days. He said

"My wings have been clipped . . . in this matter. Once upon a time I considered myself a physician who knew the cure. . . . I see that neither the Hindus nor the Muslims are prepared to try my prescription. All I can say today is that Swaraj is a will-o'-the-wisp without the heart-unity of Hindus and Muslims. If Hindus proudly imagine that they can attain Swaraj even though they may cut themselves off from Muslims, they are living in a fool's paradise. And if Muslims dream of the re-establishment of the Moghal Empire without the support of Hindus, I shall say the same thing for them."³⁹

This was the period of our modern history when barring two years before and two years after independence the two main communities became polarised. On one hand the Muslims carried on the movement of *tablig* for conversion of Hindus and on the other the Arya Samajists were busy with the *shuddhi* movement to convert the Muslims. Gandhiji was strictly opposed to conversion by temptation or threats.

In December 1926 when Gandhiji was going to participate in the Congress Session at Gauhati from Calcutta, he was informed by telegram that Swami Shraddhanand had been murdered in Delhi by a Muslim. A feeling of sadness engulfed the Congress Session. Gandhiji expressed a hope through an article in *Young India*:

" . . . but Swamiji was great enough to warrant the hope that his blood may wash us of our guilt, cleanse our hearts and cement these two mighty divisions of the human family."⁴⁰

In the same article he advised the Hindus :

"Let us not ascribe the crime of an individual to a whole community. Let us not harbour the spirit of retaliation. Let us not think of the wrong as done by a Mussalman against a Hindu, but of an erring brother against a hero."⁴¹

Gandhiji told the Muslims :

"The sword is no emblem of Islam. . . . Reliance upon the sword is wholly inconsistent with reliance upon God. There should be on their part (of the Mussalmans) unequivocal mass condemnation of the atrocity."⁴²

The difficulty about the communal question was that those very people who had worked shoulder to shoulder with Gandhiji had begun to believe that the attack in the present riots was from the other community and that they had done a lot of wicked deeds. So Gandhiji felt that his wings had been clipped. And he started to keep quiet in the matter. But occasionally he used to open his heart in private interviews. He said at one place, "Moonje (Dr. Moonje, President of the Hindu Mahasabha) wants to pay Muslims in the same coin, a masjid for a temple, killing of two Muslims for one Hindu. He says that Hindu Dharma gives moral sanction to that policy. He sent me a copy of his speech. I gave my comment : 'I congratulate you on your outspokenness. But our views are poles apart.'"⁴³ In the same interview he said "I would be equally distressed, if a Hindu temple, a Muslim masjid, a Christian church, a Jewish synagogue, or a Parsi *agiar* (fire-temple) is demolished."⁴⁴

Gandhiji talked about removal of untouchability as a part of constructive work. But he had to speak repeatedly about it due to the Vycom Satyagraha which was undertaken because the untouchables were not allowed even on the road to the Vycom temple. Before this Gandhiji had to suffer a lot because in Saurashtra and Kutch the untouchables were made to sit at a distance in the meetings.

Gandhiji repeatedly explained that the high caste Hindus were responsible for the present condition of the untouchables. He often said that to him even freedom was negligible in comparison to the service of the untouchables.

A period of three years, a tour of the whole country and a company as conducive as that of Gandhiji, naturally brought forth deep and extensive discussions about many subjects related to life. Mahadev never got tired of noting all this down. A new enthusiasm and freshness emanated from every note. That was why he dived in the sea of Gandhiji's life and thoughts, and had found out like one who dived for pearls, various shells, conches, cowries, corals, pearls and jewels. Let us have a glimpse of that wealth brought out of the sea of truth.

In a letter to Richard B. Gregg, a psychologist and an engineer from America, Gandhiji explained that the weapons of the non-co-operation movement would be unique.

"What I want to state is this: the movement is bound to fail, if we expect to succeed by adopting the same methods, or very nearly the same methods with necessary adaptations, as the adversary, if such a term can be properly used under a plan of life which admits no enemies. . . . In my opinion, we have to devise other ways of making the movement a living and universal force at least so far as India is concerned. The adversary believes in the latest appliances and therefore is bound to adopt the methods of those who are adept in using these appliances . . . It is a movement which has to grow from within. It is a movement which requires a fair measure of continuous sacrifice. . . ." ⁴⁵

In the Political Conference at Godhra on the 3rd November 1917 when Mahadev joined Gandhiji, the latter had given his own fresh definition of freedom. Mahadev noted it down when Gandhiji again referred to it in a public meeting at Godhra in January 1925.

"Freedom means possession of the power to err. He who does not possess that power can either gain the capacity to reform himself. Freedom does not at all mean perfection. Man often commits serious blunders. He sins also. But he atones for his sins and reforms himself. These things themselves mean Swaraj (—'selfrule' both individual and national)." ⁴⁶

A letter of two sentences written by Gandhiji to a German

"The one condition for fighting for peace and liberty is to acquire self-restraint. To do that it is necessary to give up the pleasure of the world." ⁴⁷

Adhering to his own definition of Swaraj, Gandhiji explains India's basis from his own point of view:

"The greatest contribution that India can render to the sum of human happiness is to attain her freedom by peaceful and truthful means. Whether such a thing will ever come to pass is more than one can say. Indeed, appearances would contradict any such belief. Nevertheless, my faith in the future of humanity is so great that I cannot but hold any other belief than that India will gain her freedom only through peaceful and truthful means and no other." ⁴⁸

Notice this statement in the above context:

"No nation has ever risen which has insisted simply upon its right. Only that nation has elevated itself which has performed its duties in a religious spirit. It was from such performance that these nations secured their rights." ⁴⁹

Adopting these ideals to the practical situation, he said

"Service of India means service of the poor in India. As God is invisible, it is enough for us if we serve the visible. Our public life means nothing more and nothing less than service of God the visible, i.e., the poor."⁵⁰

In one letter he almost gave a series of aphorisms of ethics and philosophy :

"It is our *dharma* to know everybody at his true worth and yet to love him — whether he be a saint or a sinner. We often define love as a sentiment that cannot see any fault in the person loved. We are not shocked when we commit a most heinous sin, but we find it very hard and irksome to have to confess it. But how many may there be in this whole world who not only can see the gravity of their sins, but also let the world know of it?"⁵¹

Though Gandhiji had pursued the Khadi issues with the determination of a driven man, he still made the distinction between the essence and the incidental. He told the youth in spite of insisting on their spinning. "If I have to choose between yarn and character, I would prefer character."⁵²

Having heard the miseries of the people of Kutchh, Gandhiji did not talk of going or sending someone to alleviate their pains because he believed that people should remove their difficulties with their own strength :

"But I can say this much even' now. (As for your grievances). . . the remedy lies with you and that is, not insolence and abuse but truth and love. Where the holy forces of truth, valour and love combine, no achievement is impossible."⁵³

On the subject of adventure he emphasises the point that adventure also should be value-based.

"Who may like to go in for ventures and what is the impelling force behind him? Men take risks even for committing adultery . . . or earning money. But all these exploits are suicidal — like the one of jumping into a well. Exertion and struggle should be made only for realising the self . . . Dangers should be braved for only one object — to enable you to see the glory and greatness of God."⁵⁴

Actually Gandhiji's code of ethics was dependent on his devotion to truth, and so he had the moral courage to accept his mistakes but used to be an admirer of those who did not have anything to hide in their lives. A correspondence noted by Mahadev in his diary provided an example for this. Gandhiji asked someone specifically "There is a charge that you are adulterous. . . had

heard this talk. But I did not believe it. Now I cannot disregard the man who has told me. Can you be adulterous? I was charmed by your simplicity and your courage. But what if all this is true?" In reply to that there was a loftier letter from the man: "In childhood mistakes have been committed. After that I do not remember to have thrown my waste matter into somebody else's toilet or done any such thing. You write to me that you will tear off my letter, but why? My wife has also read it."

In reply Gandhiji wrote: "... my pride in mankind has been augmented to a great extent by the knowledge that you do not consider any letter to be private. My pride has been lowered. I believed that I was probably the only one like that. You are higher on the ladder, more so because you are in an atmosphere where it is difficult to make one's private life, public. . . ." ⁵⁵

During the Maharashtra tour in 1927 when he went to Ratnagiri, Gandhiji met Savarkar on the 1st March. Savarkar was under surveillance in his own home. Mahadev had written a brief note thus: "Before going to the meeting Gandhiji met the Andaman-returned Savarkar at his house. It was not possible to discuss many subjects within five to ten minutes."

"... Savarkar asked Gandhiji to clarify his attitude about untouchability and *shuddhi*. Gandhiji cleared some of the misrepresentations and said, 'We cannot have a long talk today, but you know my regard for you as a lover of truth and as one who would lay down his life for the sake of truth. Besides, our goal is ultimately one and I would like you to correspond with me as regards all points of difference between us. And more, I . . . would not mind finding time for two or three days to come and stay with you at Ratnagiri, if necessary, to discuss these things to our mutual satisfaction.' Savarkar said '. . . I don't want to confine you and put you in the same case as I. But I will correspond with you.' " ⁵⁶

It was natural to remember Lokamanya at Ratnagiri. But Gandhiji made such a claim there that many would have been surprised:

"You know Lokamanya's Swaraj *mantra*. I do not think there has been any follower of Lokamanya who has tried to carry out the *mantra* more than I. There may be many whose efforts are equal to mine, but no one can claim to have put forth greater effort. For I know that not only is *Swaraj* our birth right, but that it is our sacred duty to win it. For, in so far as we are removed from Swaraj, we are removed from manhood, a proper manifestation of all our powers is impossible without Swaraj. The Swaraj . . . was for the whole of India, poor as

well as rich Swaraj has no meaning for the poor unless they have enough to eat."⁵⁷

FOOTNOTES .

1. CWMG - 33, p. 452
2. Ibid
3. M. D., "Day to Day with Gandhi" - VIII, p. 56
4. Ibid. p.39
5. Ibid. Vol. VI, p. 128
6. Ibid. Vol. V, pp. 295-96
7. Ibid. Vol. VI, pp. 108-109
8. Ibid. pp. 226-27
9. From a letter of 21.5.25 of the correspondence. "Devdas Papers" in Nehru Museum, Delhi
10. Ibid. Publisher, S. Ganeshan, 1928
11. CWMG - 26, p. 311
12. CWMG - 30, p. 52
13. Kakasaheb Kalelkar, *Bapu-ni-Jhanki*. pp. 46-47
14. M. D.'s *Diary* - 11, p. 157 (Guj.)
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid. - 8, p. 428. (Guj.)
17. Ibid. - 10, p. 263 (Guj.)
18. "Khadi - Kelp" - Handwritten magazine *Madhpudo* of Harijan Ashram, Sabarmati, 1926
19. M.D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", V. pp. 147-48
20. Ibid. p. 312
21. Ibid. VII, p. 346
22. Ibid. p. 346
23. Ibid. p. 273
24. Ibid. VI, p. 304
25. From Letter No S N 70508 from Gandhi Museum, Sabarmati
26. M.D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", V, p. 112
27. CWMG - 28, p. 200
28. M.D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", VII, pp. 266 to 269
29. M.D.'s *Diary* - 20, p. 144 (Guj.)
30. CWMG - 28, p. 357
31. *Shukratarak - Sama - Mahadevbhai*, p. 101
32. CWMG - 34, p. 390
33. M.D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", VII, p. 48
34. Ibid. p. 120
35. Ibid. p. 157
36. Ibid. VIII, p. 148
37. Ibid. VI, p. 152
38. M.D.'s *Diary* - 10, p. 146 (Guj.)
39. M.D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", VI, p. 229
40. CWMG - 32, p. 475

41. Ibid.
42. Ibid. pp. 474-75
43. M.D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", VIII, p. 191
44. Ibid
45. *CWMG* - 33, pp. 376-77
46. M.D. "Day to Day with Gandhi", V. p. 123
47. *CWMG* - 26, p. 45
48. *CWMG* - 31, p. 93
49. M.D., "Day to Day with Gandhi", V. p. 153
50. Ibid. p. 211
51. Ibid., VII, pp. 334-35
52. Ibid. p. 78
53. Ibid. p. 215-16
54. Ibid. p. 238
55. Ibid., IX pp. 234-35
56. *M.D.'s Diary*, - 10, p. 224 (Guj.)
57. Ibid p. 219

CHAPTER XXVII

BARDOLI AND SABARMATI

India's freedom movement was like a mountain path, twisting and turning to negotiate insurmountable obstacles, sometimes plunging into a valley after clearing one peak yet ever wending its way upwards towards the ultimate goal. Every decade brought its own challenges in the form of communal riots, sporadic incidents of violence, divisiveness among the leaders, etc. Gandhiji tried to strengthen the movement through the constructive work programme. The Satyagraha activities at the local level played a significant role in this programme. Each Satyagraha movement had a specific objective and the people involved grew in self-confidence when they realised the power of their non-violent methods.

The Satyagraha of the Champaran farm-workers, the textile workers of Ahmedabad and the agriculturists of Kheda at the end of the second decade of this century achieved their specific objectives. The Flag Satyagraha at Nagpur, the Satyagraha against the punitive tax at Borsad and those against untouchability in the third decade were also similar. But the results of these Satyagrahas were such that they increased the people's self-confidence and made them realise that they could oppose injustice successfully if they were willing to endure suffering and pain. When in 1922 Gandhiji suspended the non-co-operation movement, after the Chauri Chaura holocaust, specially the people of Bardoli were disappointed like many others but they did not sit down and do nothing. Many workers in the taluqa started the centres in Bardoli, Vedchhi, Valod, Sarbhan, Bhuvasan and such other places to promote constructive work of Khadi, removal of untouchability and prohibition. Probably because of these activities, the Bardoli Satyagraha was something unique among various Satyagrahas. The people of this area endured the greatest amount of suffering of all the Satyagrahas carried on in India. In Mahadev's words :

"Thus ended a campaign which was pursued by a peaceful peasantry with truth and patient suffering for their weapons against an enemy who could any day have crushed them to atoms. But the Bardoli peasants demonstrated to all the world that truth and non-violence cannot be crushed. The Bardoli Settlement was a triumph of truth and non-violence. . . . The Bardoli triumph was unique in that it attracted not only the attention of the nation but the whole Empire and the justice and the moderation of the people's demand won the nation's sympathy. It was unique in that it was fought by perhaps one of the meekest of the talukas in India, it affected the Revenue Department, whose dispositions, it was upto now believed, not even the gods may question, and in that it compelled a mighty Government pledged to crush the movement to yield within a fortnight of the pledge. It was unique in that the leader of the campaign shed all idea of personal prestige, and also in that the Governor of the province, who for a moment seemed to listen to dictation from Whitehall, did all that he could to bring about peace. Even the camouflage that he seems to have consented to was in the worthy cause of peace."¹

In this unique historical incident, Mahadev had a dual role, as Gandhiji's representative and a colleague of Vallabhbhai. He followed the Satyagraha and presented daily happenings before the nation and the world through its powerful pen. When the actual movement ended, the matter was handed to the Inquiry Committee, and Mahadev was one of the three representatives of the agriculturists, he worked so skilfully that the two-member committee of Englishmen had nothing but praise for the neutrality, skilful working and courtesy of the representatives of the agriculturists.

Mahadev himself has written the history of that unparalleled Satyagraha of Bardoli. Among his best creative works, *The Story of Bardoli* holds a unique position. When history was in the making, Mahadev had witnessed it with sympathy. He went to the nooks and corners of the area and weighed and evaluated the minutest details from the point of view of the purport of Satyagraha. He had reported some of the developments in the pages of *Navajvan* and *Young India*, but when he got an opportunity he wrote its history objectively when he was in the snow-bound Simla. He himself has written about the book:

"I never had the privilege of taking part as 'a combatant' in the Bardoli Satyagraha. . . . But I certainly had enough work as a 'non-combatant' . . . and because of close association with the Sardar of the campaign I had the pleasure and privilege of witnessing some of the moving scenes. I am happy to present

those and other memories of the Satyagraha in a historical narrative to Gujarat. If this narrative had been written by a 'combatant' it would have been different and if the Sardar himself had written it, it would have been still different. But the Sardar and the soldiers were not as fond of writing as they were of fighting. And so I had to undertake this work. The result is, there is not the heat in the descriptions written from 'the line of fire', nor the quiet emotion of the author of *Satyagraha in South Africa*. All this may not be there but you are bound to get something precious."²

During this Satyagraha, between February and July 1928 and during the working of the Inquiry Committee, from November 1928 to February, 1929, Mahadev had been based in Bardoli with Vallabhbhai. In between he did go to Gandhiji at Sabarmati Ashram. He did not shoulder the direct responsibility of bringing out *Young India* and *Navajivan*, but submitted articles each week. Since the time of his imprisonment in 1921-22, this was the first time Mahadev stayed away from Gandhiji for such a long duration, but this time he did not experience the pangs of separation from his master as he had done during his stay at Allahabad for *The Independent*. This time he was engrossed in practical application of the weapon of Satyagraha shown by his master. Actually it seemed that this time it was Gandhiji who suffered more from the separation as was evident from the letters he wrote to many people. He had mentioned in those letters that as Mahadev was going to Bardoli off and on, regular work could not be expected from him. Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev's Bengali mother, Urmiladevi, on 23rd February :

"Mahadev just now lives between Bardoli and Sabarmati. He is helping Vallabhbhai. He went to Bardoli last night and won't return before Monday morning."³

After two days he wrote to Ramchandran of Kerala :

"I have opened your telegram to Mahadev. As I know nothing about your correspondence with him, I am not taking any action upon it. Mahadev is at present in Bardoli. He returns on Monday at the latest when he will tell me all about your telegram and I shall do whatever is needful."⁴

Gandhiji wrote to his friend Revashankarbhai on 9th March : "I had asked Mahadev to write to you, but I am afraid that he forgot to mention one thing in the letter. Mahadev is not here so I cannot ask him. . ."⁵

Vallabhbhai also felt Mahadev's absence. When, in June, Mahadev went to Sabarmati, he slipped on the platform of the well when he went to fetch water. He had to be in bed for two or three weeks. At that Vallabhbhai, who usually addressed Mahadev with

greater formality to him, wrote a letter as 'Dear Brother Mahadev' from Bardoli :

"Dear Brother Mahadev,

You are injured and that too at a crucial moment ' It will be better if you recover soon The pain must be unbearable because the injury is on the waist But you will be all right shortly. As the bone is not broken and there is no swelling, it will be cured soon. Yet you should not be in a hurry . "6

The Story of Bardoli is not merely a diary of events at Bardoli by any writer The author may not claim to be a 'combatant' but for him it was an experiment in Satyagraha and as he had full sympathy with the farmers, Mahadev was neck-deep in the struggle. Moreover, he was not only the adviser to its commander but also an admirer of his. To this background was added the eloquence of his trained pen The book is not a dry narrative of history but an interesting volume revealing the living movement In the period between the movement and the formation of the Inquiry Committee, Mahadev, Vallabhbhai and Swami Anand went to Simla to spend some days with Vithalbhai, Vallabhbhai's elder brother It was during that period that the major part of *The Story of Bardoli* was written.

To analyse history and write it according to topics occasionally becomes repetitive If this can be overlooked, this book could become an interesting volume of Modern Indian History. Mahadev covered the story of the farmers' suffering during Satyagraha in the first part of the book, and the result and the working of the Inquiry Committee in the second part :

"Being reminded of the famous utterance of Mahakavi Kalidas, I have described the First Part of the history as *Klesh* (Anguished effort) and the latter one as *Fala* (Result). Anguished effort forms again the new."7

In the 38 Chapters and 4 Appendices Mahadev recorded the facts according to dates, described the history of the struggle between the forces of oppression and forces of truth and also gave an analysis of the situation He described the special attributes of the implements of Satyagraha He explained Vallabhbhai's strategies of the struggle and conveyed a live image of how the changes in the atmosphere gradually changed the attitudes of Hindus, Muslims and Parsis of Bardoli so that eventually a meek people became bold enough to stand against oppressive officials, hefty Pathans, vagabonds and senior British officials

Mahadev wrote :

"It was in the year 1917-18 that Sjt. Vallabhbhai came under Gandhiji's influence and learnt from him the first principle of Indian nationalism - that the real India is to be

found in the Indian villages and the peasant is at the heart and centre of it," and that no scheme of freedom or programme of work would have any meaning unless it was framed with special, even exclusive reference to the peasant. And among those who devoted themselves to carry out the teaching, the name of Vallabhbhai stands out prominently. The master, a non-peasant philosopher enunciated the principles, the disciple, a born peasant, worked out the practical applications and gave all his time and energy to carrying them out in various spheres.

. Nowhere have I found in his speeches references to the peasant in the moving way in which he has done in Bardoli. He had realised quite some time back that the main problem that the peasants faced was that of land revenue, and if he wanted to serve the peasants of Gujarat he had to address this problem, Bardoli gave him this chance. When Gandhiji asked him whether he was certain about the validity of the complaint of the peasants of the Bardoli he had replied that even if he had not read the articles he was sure that the complaint was valid."

Mahadev's respect for Vallabhbhai increased considerably during the Bardoli Satyagraha. Here is how he saw him.

"I was with Vallabhbhai four years ago in Borsad. Thereafter, too, I have heard him speak, but never before had I heard such brilliance in his language or seen such indignation in his eyes. He seemed to suffer physical pain himself when he heard that the land of some poor peasant was forfeited. His words were full of the pain which made one realise that he felt personally at the hardships that were being inflicted. The villagers were moved by the extraordinary eloquence of his speeches and by his astonishingly simple yet effective popular similes and analogies. In these meetings I saw for the first time the great command over the Gujarati language that he possessed and which was so completely free of the influence of English."

Mahadev, along with the people of Bardoli, was an admirer of Vallabhbhai's bravery and his strategy, which were like that of Chanakya. But Mahadev's main attraction was Vallabhbhai's adherence to values. The struggle started basically because of the unjust increase in land revenue. An impartial inquiry was demanded. That demand was audaciously rejected outright by the Government. Then came the months-long suffering of the people of the whole taluka quietly undergone according to the tenets of Satyagraha. Thousands of peasants had the yellow-paper notices of property-annexation stuck on their houses, there were fines, confiscations, auctions of animals, household goods and land; confinement with the

animals within the house to escape confiscation. Hundreds of volunteers and peasants were imprisoned. Headmen and *talatis* resigned. Harrassment of men and women by hired Pathans brought from Bombay was openly perpetrated. People moved *en masse* to the Gaikwadi villages from the British territory. Mahadev recorded an incident about Vallabhbhai when the talks for compromise were under way. The negotiations were in progress at Sir Chunilal Mehta's place in Poona. His reputation was such that it was believed that no one else understood the Government's intentions better than he. After a lot of discussion with the members of the Government he brought a draft to be signed by the Assembly Members from Surat. The draft read :

"We are glad to be able to say that we are in a position to inform Government that the conditions laid down by His Excellency the Governor in his opening speech to the Council dated 23rd July will be fulfilled."¹¹

Vallabhbhai and others asked some questions regarding the draft to which Sir Chunilal replied :

"That is not your concern. If the members are agreeable to addressing the letter, you need not worry as to *how, when* and *by whom* the conditions will be fulfilled. You will pay the old assessment *after* the inquiry is announced."¹²

Now the point of contention in this struggle was that the people under the leadership of Vallabhbhai had demanded an inquiry into whether the new valuation of the land-revenue was just or not, and the Government was insisting on the payment of the new land revenue before the inquiry. The explanation given by Sir Chunilal made it clear that demand about the payment of land revenue by the people was accepted, but things were not said in specific terms, and so if anyone signed the draft and the Government appointed an Inquiry Committee on that basis, it would be an excuse on the part of the Government. This was what Vallabhbhai felt, and so he was in a dilemma. Mahadev further wrote :

"Swami Anand and I happened to be with Sjt Vallabhbhai during those anxious hours. Sir Chunilal saw no less than we that agreement was impossible and negotiations must break down, and he retired sorely disappointed. Until the small hours of the morning we sat discussing the draft of a letter to be sent to His Excellency the Governor explaining why the negotiations had to break down. We prepared a draft and retired to rest our limbs. In about two hours I got up still thinking of Sir Chunilal's formula. We give no undertaking, nor do the Surat members give any. If Government must have that meaningless formula, we can afford to give that sop of Cerberus.

But it is a compromise with truth, said Sjt Vallabhbhai

'I agree,' said I, 'but it is a compromise on the part of the Government.'

'But won't we be party to it?'

'No,' said I. 'Not if we plainly tell Government what they are doing.'

'Well, then, you are prepared to tell Sir Chunilal that Government are compromising with truth?'

'Certainly, I do so forthwith.'

'But, look here,' said Sjt Vallabhbhai, 'I frankly do not see this game. Why don't they face facts? What do you think Bapu would say? What do you say, Swami?'

Never was the Sardar higher in my estimation than that day. His anxiety to have the opinion of humble companions like Swami and myself seemed to be as great as his anxiety to find out what 'Bapu' (Gandhiji) would think of his attitude.

Thus fortified in his own conviction which was clear that there was neither compromise of truth or of the principle of the Master on *our* part. He said, "But will the Surat members sign this meaningless formula?"

'I dare say,' said I. 'They also must see through the game and Sir Chunilal seemed to be sure that they should have no objection to subscribing to that formula.'

'Well then,' said the Sardar, 'if they sign it, I would have no objection. But we should make our position once again clear to Sir Chunilal and tell him plainly that Government are compromising with truth.'

"I went to Sir Chunilal and explained the situation to him. 'It is well that you make your position clear.' 'I shall make it all clear to Government,' he said. As we were discussing the thing, Sjt Vallabhbhai looked in, again emphasised the points of compromise and expressed his fear that Government might not, after all, be prepared to accept the 'information' that the proposed letter sought to convey. The draft was too good or too bad for Government to accept. But Sir Chunilal seemed to have no doubt. Well, the ways of Government are inscrutable, and the moment Sjt Vallabhbhai said that if the Surat members had no objection to signing the document, he would have gone, the settlement was complete."¹³

Mahadev wrote further:

"But if the Government were satisfied with clutching at the shadow of prestige, Sjt Vallabhbhai could not be content without the substance. All that he wanted was full, independent, judicial inquiry and a restoration of the status quo. The

Government were perfectly agreeable, provided their prestige did not suffer. The inquiry in the very words suggested by Vallabhbhai including an unconscious grammatical slip minus the clause about coercive measures — was to be announced immediately.”¹⁴

As a man of literature Mahadev was highly impressed by Vallabhbhai's powerful language originating from his peasant-culture. In his book Mahadev quoted at the beginning of each chapter, fitting quotes from Vallabhbhai's speeches. And a number of quotations are contained throughout in the text. The ray of strength given to the people by the Bardoli Satyagraha was evident in Sardar's words and that was reflected in Mahadev's book and articles. That was Vallabh-Mahadev's contribution to making Gujarati language powerfully effective.

The following heart-rending descriptions from the book display Mahadev's talent with due respect to the restriction of the translation :

“We stayed for a week at Bardoli. I feel like mentioning two deaths that took place during that week. The two women who died had not got publicity through the newspapers or were neither famous as workers or volunteers. But it would be useful to know how their end came about.

“One of them was bed ridden for quite a few months. She had requested Mohanlal Pandya to let her have Gandhiji's *darshan*. As she could not leave the bed, Pandya told her, ‘I shall request Gandhiji to come.’ Some women had got together for spinning in a neighbouring house. As Gandhiji came out after watching the spinning, Pandya told him about that sick woman. Gandhiji immediately agreed and went there. The woman was sitting on the bed. Her body was like a skeleton covered by her clothes. Death was clearly looming large in her eyes, but even the eyes which espied death, expressed the joy of Gandhiji's presence before her. Very slowly she came to the edge of the bed. She wanted to garland Gandhiji, but could not stretch her hands. Gandhiji bent down and she garlanded him. She took out some money from her pocket, offered it to him and put *kumkum* on his forehead. Gandhiji left her saying, ‘Be peaceful.’

“Who knew that the poor thing was waiting only for Gandhiji's *darshan* ? Next day all the signs of death became clearly visible. Her relatives asked her, ‘Do you desire anything ?’ She did not have any desire left. It seemed that all her wishes had been fulfilled on seeing Gandhiji. She only showed one desire ‘Send me away in Khadi clothes.’ Her

clothes were changed and that very day, after some time she passed away.

"Who can realise as to what must have been her thoughts till her death, before and after Gandhiji's *darshan* ? But those resulted in the wish for Gandhiji's *darshan*, to put on Khadi and die. We could say from all this that it was a sacred death.

"The other death was not of a woman who was ailing or bed-ridden for a long time. Apparently she looked healthy. She was about twenty years old. Her father, Rambhai, was in Sabarmati Jail because of the Bardoli Satyagraha. His wife had had her interview with him some days previously, in jail. The next turn for interview was this girl's. But because of the settlement of the dispute, she did not have to go for the interview to the Sabarmati Jail, and she started from Vankaner to welcome her father at Bardoli. She had pain in her stomach after walking for three or four miles in mud and water, and so she sat down on the way to rest. Others came to Bardoli and sent a vehicle for her in which she came to Bardoli. She took to bed after reaching there at eleven in the morning. Her stomachache became unbearable by the evening. She couldn't lie down even for a second. She would sit up in the bed, stand up, try to vomit, throw out a little, but did not feel at all easy. The people around her tried to do whatever they could, but there was no relief. She couldn't swallow medicine, neither could her stomach be flushed. Doctors said, 'She would get relief, if an operation could be performed. But how can we operate here ?' By this time it was midnight. Her pain was unbearable ! But she showed as much patience as she had pain. She was neither screaming nor crying; she would ask for help to stand up or for massaging her feet. That's all. After midnight her limbs began to become numb, she felt that she was going to die. At three in the morning she requested, 'Please call Gandhiji, I want to have his *darshan*.' In clutches of all this agony, she was not hurt by the fact of not being able to meet her father, of dying in Bardoli away from her mother, but she thought of Gandhiji. A message was sent to Gandhiji's camp. He immediately came. Moti (the dying girl) did not have strength in her limbs. Her eyes also could not see clearly. So she said, 'I cannot see, but I can recognise Gandhiji by his voice. Please someone help me to join my hands.' Then she requested to have Vallabhbhai's *darshan*. All this occurred at four in the morning. Life was ebbing away slowly. At six in the morning everything was over. The amount of suffering was evident after her death. A stream of blood came out from her

mouth. Her intestines had blocked the downward way and there was no way for the blood and so it found the outlet from above. In such acute suffering there was not a drop of tear, no cowardice, no nervousness and no effort to make others nervous. Only a request for Gandhiji's *darshan* and also that of Vallabhbhai. Gandhiji said about her death in the evening, 'I saw Moti yesterday for the first time. I did not know her, but she was a brave woman.'

"Moti's mother was called after her death. She did shed tears but did not lament. Gandhiji persuaded her and others to forego all loud lamentations and beating of breasts. She kept her promise even after going home. Next day the dead girl's father came from Sabarmati after his release. He also did not lament and when Gandhiji went to Vankar on the same day, he put him up at his own house. Moti's father was quiet. Her mother's eyes were moist. And in spite of mourning there was felicity at Gandhiji's arrival.

"People of Bardoli demonstrated that they knew how to live by fighting, that they also knew how to die."¹⁵

In the Committee appointed by the Government, Mr Broomfield, who had conducted Gandhiji's historic trial in the Circuit House at Ahmedabad, was the representative of the Department of Justice, and Mr Maxwell represented the Revenue Department. Mahadev, Narahari and Ramnarayan V. Pathak were selected by the people to represent the peasants. It might be recollected that all three were close friends when they were students. Later, Mahadev became known as Gandhiji's secretary, Narahari as an economist and educationalist and R. V. Pathak as a celebrated scholar of Gujarati language. Mohanlal Pandya, Kalyanji V. Mehta, Gordhandas Chokhawala and several other workers were ever ready to help the three representatives. The Inquiry Committee was appointed through a resolution of 18th October 1928. From 1st November members from both sides commenced their work. The first fortnight was spent in preparation and reading reports. On the 5th, Bhulabhai Desai, a well-known advocate of Bombay, presented the case of the people before the two officials. The actual inquiry started on the 14th November and the work of Bardoli Taluka ended on the last date of February. According to Mahadev and his colleagues the effect of the result declared by the Inquiry Committee was beneficial from both the ethical and the material points of view. "The enhancement fixed before the Inquiry for both the talukas was Rs. 1,87,482. It was reduced to Rs. 48,648 which means that the two talukas were relieved of a yearly burden of nearly one hundred and forty thousand rupees, if not more, for some of the recommended

rates are strictly *illegal* and Government are themselves trying to remedy the illegalities. There are quite a number of minor recommendations in the Report regarding the existing anomalies in assessment and soil classification, apart from the rates. These are bound to result in some small gains for the peasants."

"It is impossible to exaggerate the moral results of the victory. It was recognised throughout India and even in the Empire that the peasant who is usually regarded as 'a sack of meal' can organise himself and offer battle to Government that persists until the last moment that it cannot be in the wrong."¹⁶

The work of this Inquiry Committee was supported by the ceaseless effort of the three representatives of the people and their colleagues. "The two officials working in the Government Departments praised Mahadev, Narahari and Ramnarayan V. Pathak in the forwarding letter sent with their official report, even though only a few months earlier they were on different sides of the battle lines. They described their relationship as 'very cordial'; the help given by the people's representatives as 'very valuable' and the attitude of the people as of 'ready co-operation beyond our expectation' and 'absolutely without enmity'.¹⁷

The description of this struggle, given by Mahadev, has taken its place in the literature of the science of non-violence. And people of all the six Continents of the world study and think of the peasants of Bardoli, their quiet courage, the bravery of their commander, his patience, his capacity to being one with the people, his skill in planning the struggle for the non-violent movement, when they take training in non violent non-co-operation. All this is possible because Mahadev presented a clean picture to the nation and the world.

This whole struggle was conducted under Vallabhbhai's leadership. Actually, it was of this campaign of Bardoli that earned him the title of "Sardar" among the people. Gandhiji followed the developments from Sabarmati. But he did not go to Bardoli without Vallabhbhai's permission, nor had he given a single speech there without his 'order'. Through the articles in *Navajivan* and *Young India* he had strongly supported many steps taken by Vallabhbhai. Sardar never failed to refer to the non-violent guidance given by Gandhiji in all his speeches. Gandhiji himself praised Vallabhbhai's spiritual achievement through the Bardoli movement in the following words.

"You may not know but I will tell you that Vallabhbhai has come back victorious from Bardoli. . . . But you do not know of his other victory. . . . Vallabhbhai has got his *Vallabh* (Master) in Bardoli. . . . In his effort to make the people conscious of their strength, Vallabhbhai has become more

conscious of his own duty — religion. It was not that he was not religious, but he learnt in Bardoli the miraculousness of religion . . . If someone gets his speeches of Bardoli printed, it will be collection of speeches on religion.”¹⁸

The Bardoli movement removed the depression that was gripping the nation for the past few years. Many functions were held at various places to celebrate the Bardoli victory, and a large public gathering took place to welcome the Sardar. The welcome given to him at Sabarmati is interesting from the point of view of his biography. Mahadev wrote in a letter from Ahmedabad to Pyarelal who was like a twin-brother in Gandhiji's service and who was handling the English language publicity from the Satyagraha Camp at Bardoli :

“My dearest Pyara,

Your description of the scattered camp is very apt. I hope it would not take long to become normal again.

The procession at Ahmedabad was magnificent, but the arrangements did not compare at all with those at Surat. The Surat meeting was fit for the Gods to see. The meeting here was a stage for demons to dance. But Bapu spoke after his ‘disciple’ and transformed the hell into heaven. I am sure you would like tomorrow's Bardoli-Issue of *Navajivan*. I had written about sixteen columns — my thoughts in six and the speeches in the ten. I am proud of this achievement. I am sure you will be a partner to it.

The welcome that the Ashram gave him was just excellent. Poor Panditji came with the line of known tune at midnight and asked me to compose a song in praise of Vallabhbhai's victory, which he could sing. I composed it in ten minutes. And our people's poet . . . Jugatram may say what he wants to but I am sure that as a composition for an occasion it was lauded by all.

But the best part is yet to come. The above is the most insignificant part. The best part was Bapu's contribution — silence. Ba's applying the victory-mark on Vallabhbhai's forehead. I will add here, Maganlal and Vinoba had created no end of a row when *tilak* was applied on the forehead of Poet Tagore, seven years ago, when he came to the Ashram, and then every one gave yarn spun by himself, specially for Vallabhbhai, in which Bapu's yarn was more than 180 yards. Within two or three days that yarn would be woven — only fine yarn would be accepted, uneven and thick yarn would be discarded — all these suggestions came from Bapu.

Then Bapu asked Vallabhbhai, ‘Will you say something?’ Profound silence made Vallabhbhai emotional and his throat

was choked. His speech was short. I am not giving its gist, but it came from his heart.

Then we went to Vidyalyaya. Vallabhbhai's lecture there was a sample of noisy pleasantry. He shook the Vidyapith by the laughter his talk generated. Students will remember him for ever.

Vallabhbhai is getting into his original form in surprising manner. The effect of fatigue is gone, and he is getting better and better as he gets rest in his 'snacks oriented' club.

Well, here is my jewel. Let the jeweller give his opinion after observing its lustre ! . . . !

Auspicious moment on auspicious day,

Welcome to the Brave Warrior,

Astonished, surprised, the nation and the world,

Look to Bardoli !

Power of oppression and injustice is no more !

With fearlessness, the peasant holds his head high,

Truth and Peace, are triumphant,

Vallabh's praises are joyously sung by all —

Darkness of deep depression is lifted,

Hope shines through India's eyes —

Tell Jugatram, it was impossible for me to reply to his letters — Durga was sick. And my time was divided in the turmoil of Vallabhbhai, *Navajivan* and the Ashram.

M. D.¹⁹

During the Bardoli Satyagraha one of Vallabhbhai's sayings became current in every village. It was "When iron becomes hot it becomes red. Sparks fly out of it. But howsoever hot the iron is the hammer should be cool. If the hammer gets hot it will burn its own handle . . . so in the face of any calamity we should not get angry. Just as there was the attitude of a mind not troubled in sorrows in this advice, Sardar's attitude during the festivities was that of one 'who longeth not for joy'.²⁰ Mahadev proved through giving many examples that Sardar's religious attitude expressed itself both in difficulty and festivity. When the English translation of the history of Bardoli Satyagraha was published, Gandhiji welcomed the book with a special note in *Young India* :

"Mahadev Desai who was the literary secretary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel during the Bardoli Satyagraha campaign wrote some months ago the history of that great and eventful struggle in Gujarati. Sardar Vallabhbhai had intended that an English edition too should be published so that a wider public may be in possession of faithful record of the events. Mahadev Desai had first-hand and intimate knowledge of most of the stirring events of those exciting times. He has now placed before the

public an English edition. In view of the impending upheaval during the coming year, the book should be read by every national worker."²¹

The Poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote :

"I have finished your *Story of Bardoli*. It has the spirit of the Epic Age in its narrative of the triumph of moral right over arbitrary power through a fight, moral in character, unique in modern times. I thank you, and the leader of the fight and the fighters, also your great guide. My blessings."²²

The Bardoli Satyagraha was a major event in the nation's history and Mahadev's life in 1928. However, his responsibilities were not limited to Bardoli alone.

During this year Mahadev had to repeatedly travel between Bardoli and Sabarmati. By the end of 1927, the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati had become a training centre for Satyagrahis and volunteers from every corner and every province coming to Gandhiji's Ashram to be trained in the values and the practice of Satyagraha. From time to time, foreign guests also stayed for months in the Ashram to learn in depth the principles of non violence. They felt that the formula and technique of non violence became alive in the Ashram. Miraben had come to stay there permanently from 1925. Richard B. Gregg from America also stayed for months together. He wrote on the subject non-violence and the economics of Khadi. Mahadev had written a detailed review of his book, *Economics of Khaddar*, in *Navajivan*. His book, *The Power of Non Violence* is considered almost like a textbook for students of non-violence.

In January 1928, a meeting of the Working Committee of a multi-religious institution named 'International Brotherhood' took place at the Sabarmati Ashram. Its members and friends, about 35 men and women, spent three days with the Ashramites. The members of the Brotherhood were very happy to see the Ashramites who belonged to different religions and spoke different languages, working together to initiate the same aim, sharing life's joys and sorrows. They invited some of the Ashramites to participate in some of their discussions, they discussed with Gandhiji in detail about religion, conversion in religion, non violence, love and such other subjects. Mahadev made the notes of these discussions in his diary. Gandhiji's concept of religion can be found in the following paragraph.

"If you have gathered together to enhance brotherhood, your activities should be religious. There should be renunciation in it. I had concluded years back as a result of many discussions that all religions are genuine; all are incomplete,

wanting somewhere, but all are genuine. And so even though I may stick to my own religion I must have equal respect and love for other religions, which means that I must consider everyone as equal. And so it should not be my prayer(s) as a Hindu that people of other religions should accept Hinduism, nor should Muslims pray that people of other faiths should accept Islam, nor should Christians pray that all should become Christians. But our prayers should be that every one should be firm in one's own religion, a Christian should be a true Christian, a Hindu a true Hindu, and a Muslim a true Muslim. My mind should not harbour even a secret feeling that others should accept my religion. This is the foundation of brotherhood."²³

Mahadev wrote after noticing the reactions of the members of the Brotherhood :

"The advice, 'Do not wish secretly that a man of another religion should accept your religion', made many members think rather deeply. There are many among the Christians and Muslims who so desire. All expressed their own thoughts. Gandhiji, therefore, had to be more specific about his thoughts :

'My position is different to that of Imamsaheb. That I must be pure to spread my religion is no doubt correct, but I would not even wish that anyone should discard his religion and accept mine. My prayers would always be that Imamsaheb should be an excellent Muslim and rather be an excellent man than an excellent Muslim. I consider Hinduism's message of non-violence as wonderful. Just as I consider my wife as the most beautiful woman, I find my religion the most wonderful. But others also can think the same about their religions. If someone got a thought independently that he must change his religion, it is a different matter. A man can honestly change his religion. But it becomes entirely different when there is propaganda for the religion. I would declare that I will not go to spread my religion even to the people who are supposed to be ancient, wild and without religion. That is my pride.'"²⁴

Gandhiji's third son Ramdas got married in the Ashram on the 27th January. Mahadev gave the following description :

"The rites began at eight in the morning and at about half past nine they were over. Everyone gathered at 9.30 at the place of prayers and Gandhiji blessed the bride and the bridegroom. . . . 'Ramdas I have built many hopes on you', saying this he choked. 'You have acknowledged some of your faults to me.' Once again a truthful father felt choked at the thought of the honesty of a son who preserved the heritage of truth; he

kept quiet for a few moments. It was not the affection of an ordinary father for a son which was choking him, but it was Gandhiji's love for truth. Who can describe those moments of pure love and affection?

"At last Gandhiji controlled himself and said, 'But I have told you that I am not afraid, because I have not taken your faults to heart. I have considered you simple and innocent in spite of your confession, I am happy, you do not cheat the world by becoming clever and if the world cheats by considering you simple, I will be proud. Remain as you are. Do not be embarrassed if you are poor. Do not be afraid. . . .

" 'Take care of Nimu, my daughter-in-law, do not become master but be her friend. Protect her, that is her body and her morals, and Nimu must protect your body and your morals.' "25

In the month of April, an incident occurred which shocked Gandhiji and the Ashram. Maganlal Gandhi, considered as the 'life of the Ashram' died on 23rd April, 1928. His daughter, Radha, was in Bihar working amongst the women there to persuade them to give up *purdah*. At that time Maganlal had gone to Bengal for some reason. He went from there to Bihar to meet his daughter, when he died at Patna after a week's illness. Gandhiji broke his silence to console his wife, Santokben; he, however, saw to it that the Ashram's activities continued as usual. Gandhiji himself got messages of condolence through letters and telegrams from many corners of the nation. Some English newspapers printed Maganlal Khushalchand Gandhi as M. K. Gandhi which resulted in confusion of names and brought forth many letters from South Africa to learn the correct news about Gandhiji. Mahadev was very saddened by Maganlal Gandhi's death. He paid tribute to Maganlal by writing articles, one after the other, in *Navajivan*. Mahadev described his death as 'Falling of a Thunderbolt' and a 'Terrible Shock'. About Gandhiji he wrote, "His loss at this moment is far greater than I can imagine." And said in a letter:

"I have become agitated and bewildered. Maganlal was the Ashram and Ashram was Maganlal. His work in the field of Khadi was permanent. And none of the Khadi workers had his knowledge, his skill, his devotion, his faith. . . . He was the best among Bapu's colleagues and representatives. . . . he was like a cover over our faults and shortcomings. If Bapu is to be adjudged on the strength of Maganlal's character, there could be no objection. It would be a great calamity if Bapu is adjudged on the strength of my character. It is difficult to forget his joyful, energetic face, and the Ashram would never be the same as it was during his lively presence."26

There was a unique mixture of sternness and leniency, harshness and sensitivity in the dealings about the management regarding the maintenance of vows and mutual relationships in the Ashram. It is possible that Gandhiji's character — harsher than a thunderbolt and softer than a flower — was mainly responsible for this. For an instance when the Ashram was started at Kochrab, Gandhiji and others stayed at Jeevanlal's bungalow. After some time arrangements were made for some Ashramites in a yellow bungalow a bit farther off the main road. The impression at that time was that more experienced Ashramites stayed at Jivanlal's bungalow and the new comers in the yellow one. Prabhudas Gandhi wrote in his article of memoirs written and sent to this author as late as 23rd November 1991, "In Kochrab the Ashramites were divided into two groups. The situation, though never announced, was such that those staying at the road-side bungalow number one, were classed as first-class Ashramites, while those staying in the bungalow number two (yellow bungalow), were second class Ashramites, although, there was only one kitchen for the Ashramites from both the bungalows."²⁷ Even in this there were exceptions. Maganlal Gandhi, a senior and experienced member stayed in the yellow bungalow. In those days Gandhiji insisted that the Ashramites should lay greater emphasis on the five important vows. Those members who took the pledge also had been divided amongst the two bungalows. Prabhudas Gandhi further continues the history in his 'memoirs', "There used to be tents where the present Sabarmati Ashram stands. Then some separate huts of strong mats were made. At that time the huts were built on both sides of the road, which passed through the Ashram. Without any announcement it happened that the area covered by the huts housed the Rashtriya Shala, and the area covered by the tents, housed the Ashramites, and that is how the feeling of being first and second in Kochrab was replaced by the specific definition of the place in those of the Shala and those of the Ashram. Buildings of brick and lime were built for those belonging to the Ashram."

(Prabhudas continued) "Amongst all those staying on both sides of the road, generally, those staying on the East side were pledged to the eleven vows, while those on the West were making an effort in that direction. Kishorelalbhai, Kakasaheb and Chhaganlal Gandhi, insistent about celibacy in married life, lived on the western side of the road. Ramvinodbabu and Gulbadanben, not pledged, but those making an effort, were also staying on the western side." Prabhudas wrote "My analysis is that though there is no doubt that there were two divisions of the Ashramites along the two sides of the jail road, there was a scope for give and take regarding residence. The statement of Maniben Parikh as to one division being of those

pledged and another of those who were not pledged but trying, was correct. But it should be added that there were pledged people even on the western side. There was not that strictness that no one but the pledged could stay in the east. Those trying had been allowed to stay.⁷²⁸

There was exception in the vows of *asvaad* (control of the palate) and non-possession. Maganlal was very insistent on *asvaad*. His elder brother and Prabhudas's father, Chhaganlal, took *murabba* (a jam prepared from raw mangoes) Maganlal did not. When the families living in the Ashram cooked their own meals, Maganlal took his in the community kitchen. His younger brother, Narandas, did not take the vow of non-possession but he did not take Rs. 75/ per month from the Ashram for his living as Maganlal did. He managed his affairs from the amount he had earned in business in Bombay before coming to the Ashram. On one hand, there was insistence about the vows, on the other, there was flexibility regarding them.

Mahadev was amongst those who were making an effort regarding the vows and, therefore, he used to give a lot of thought to it when he was in the Ashram. He was Gandhiji's devotee. He always felt inquisitive, eager and enthusiastic about every experiment undertaken by Gandhiji. But his devotion was neither blind nor one that followed without questions. And so whenever he did not accept an idea he discussed it with Gandhiji freely, yet with all humility. A long discussion took place when Gandhiji suggested that the Ashram should have different kitchens for men and women. Mahadev, along with his close friend, Narahari, wrote a letter to Gandhiji. The entire letter is quoted :

"Respected Bapuji,

A number of feelings engulf us while writing this letter. The pain of Maganlal's demise has not receded at all. And we keep thinking day and night how we can follow his example. On top of that our confusion is worse confounded by our inability to take over suggestion regarding the change of direction. Had we the strength we would have lessened your pain by promising to stand in his place and take up the sacrificial activities that were his. We have written this letter feeling that it would not be proper to accept your suggestion only to relieve your pain or to do something unusual in this difficult period. If the intellect grasps a thing and the heart does not, the heart can derive strength from the feeling such as shown above, but on this occasion we are duty-bound to relieve our minds by expressing our thoughts when our intellect refuses to accept the suggestions :

1. The system of the Ashram should be built on the concept of one family, there cannot be two opinions at our place that in the Ashram no individual should work only for one's own end, the individuals should take into consideration the well-being of the entire family and of the country through the family. There may be difference of opinion when drawing a line where the welfare of the family ends and the self-interest of the individual begins. We must take the liberty of expressing our doubts about the joint family bringing an end to the individual self-interest which could be your view. The peculiar combination of men-women of different natures and different likes and dislikes, brought together by external pressure is likely to give rise to quarrels, bitterness and extreme dissatisfaction. It would be a question whether there would be unity and peace even if all your time is spent remedying the situation, what strength does any one else have to combat it? We cannot find any one else but yourself capable enough to run a community kitchen for the whole Ashram. What is the point of starting something which appears to be impossible to the intellect?

2. You consider a community kitchen an enclosure for *brahmacharya*. Moreover, you are suggesting the necessity for men and women to stay separately for *brahmacharya*; this is not acceptable to us. Those men and women who have for years been together, lived together, thought together, who built hopes together, who have given warmth to each other, would pine for each other if rent asunder and would mentally break *brahmacharya* to a greater degree. The renunciation forced without asceticism would create such mental perversion that they would find people around them disagreeable, and they would become disagreeable to others. What work could you take from such heart-broken people? This applies more to women than men, because they have followed their husbands here and they need the warmth from their husbands. The small amount of enthusiasm or joy they may have of going into a wider field than the domestic one, would completely diminish due to this plan. And it would not be surprising if their sighs kill the plant in the form of the Ashram family at the very beginning of its growth.

3. We find a difference in the concept of *brahmacharya* as envisaged by the Managing Committee and by you. The Managing Committee had understood the rule of *brahmacharya* as the giving up of passionate touch between men and women. You are asking for adding the forsaking of women, which

amounts to asceticism, while we had the concept of a celibate householder. The ideal of asceticism may be a higher ideal, but for us a step towards a purified householder's life would seem to be enough.

4. You say that we do not want to establish an order. But the changes you have suggested would turn the Ashram into a convent of the Roman Catholics — nuns and brothers or a monastery of the Buddha *bhikku-bhikkunis*. Brothers or *bhikkus* have guided the society, they have shown society the way through their teaching, but they remained out of society. They have never been considered as ideal for the society, while you want that Ashram-life should spread in the society.

The ideal of celibate householder can spread in society but not that of an ascetic. If we stay separately as you suggest, we would be separated from the society. Today we move about in the society as those belonging to it. If we have truth and value in us, the life we are leading today will have an effect on the society. But if our management becomes like that of convent or a monastery, we would be considered as ascetics or semi-ascetics of some sect. It does not seem to be desirable to become or be considered as such. The respect received by Maganlalbhai who was an active, celibate, ideal householder, who left an imprint on society, would not be possible for anyone practising celibacy either in a segregated camp or by remaining a bachelor.

5. A combined kitchen of the whole Ashram does not seem likely to become a guarded enclosure for practising celibacy. We perceive many risks in such a mixed up life of men and women. In the kitchen there would be many young, unmarried girls, and young men passing through a time of mental turmoil and adolescence, there would be married women with unsatisfied passions and men trying to forcibly suppress their passions. All these will come in very close contact with each other because of various functions of the kitchen — where then would be the fence? To avoid one difficulty a greater difficulty is likely to arise.

6. You are afraid that the Ashram will go to pieces if there is not a common kitchen for the whole of the Ashram; but the risk and fear in the mixed working of men and women in a common kitchen is far more grave than that in any of the couples, failing to keep their celibacy intact. And so the type of people we have in the Ashram would be more likely to break it to pieces by their dissatisfaction and distress if they are gathered in a common kitchen by the external force of a rule.

7 Those that have not overcome a certain stage, find many occasions for a fall in a common kitchen. Even today many people keep on watching how much milk and *ghee* is consumed by others. They complain that they don't eat as much as they pay for, and so a lesser amount should be collected from them. If some one person is given a different item of food others want that. If different things are made for people with different tastes and if many items of food are lying before all, the situation would be troublesome to the taste buds of weak minded person. The king of the ascetics whom you are imagining as the head of the kitchen, may go on with his own progress day by day, but others will be in daily danger of slipping from their decisions.

8 The segregation of men and women will not have a good effect on the children. It is necessary for its total development that a child gets the joint company of both mother and father who practise self restraint. The distress, bitterness, a dissatisfaction arising out of the compulsory segregation of men and women will create a distressing effect on the children. Just as the family is an economic unit of society, so also it is a cultural unit.

9. The best aspect of the Ashram is the presence of men and women with self-restraint and decorum. We would say that, that is the Ashram's greatest beauty. The introduction of the rule of *brahmacharya* would add to that beauty. But the segregation of men and women would destroy that beauty and we do not know what we would get in its place ! We are afraid of something evil turning up.

10. You are pointing out several difficulties : firstly, we will not be able to manage the onrush of the new comers without a common kitchen, secondly, we won't be able to do service to the women, thirdly, it would be very inconvenient to keep couples as guests. It is possible that these difficulties might be solved by the plan we take the liberty to suggest as under :

(i) There should be three types of kitchen in the Ashram .
 (a) for the married couple; (b) common for men, and (c) common for women. We are suggesting (c) but it seems to be difficult. If that difficulty cannot be removed, let the women eat in the common kitchen for men, but all activities should take place in the company of men;

(ii) It is definitely desirable that the manager of the common kitchen should be a single man without encumbrances;

(iii) No man or woman can keep a separate kitchen without the special permission of the Managing Committee;

(iv) All guests apart from the close relatives of married couples should take their meals in the common kitchen. But the Manager of the Ashram would have the right to send any guests for meals to married couples;

(v) The aims of the Ashram could be clearly defined in details and those who sign that document, get the right to vote or give an opinion regarding the system of the Ashram;

(vi) The men and women not properly connected with any of the Ashram activities cannot stay at the Ashram;

(vii) The Managing Committee would not give permission, unless under special circumstances, for people to stay in the Ashram for a long time, merely for elevating themselves, but not connected directly with any activity of the Ashram. The definition of 'Special Circumstances' is left to the discretion of Managing Committee.

Over and above this those that come to stay in the Ashram must observe all the rules listed in the Ashram rules till they stay there.

This plan removes the difficulties you indicated. We would accept the newcomers according to our convenience and conditions. If we need some individual for our activity and he is not prepared to come alone and if he needs a separate kitchen for his family we shall make the arrangement, if possible. We would have faith in their word regarding their observance of celibacy. We would take them only if we have faith in their word and so there would be no question of keeping much of a watch over them. The rule of celibacy is enough to prevent insincere, useless people wanting to come. When we joined, if the Ashram had the rule for celibacy adopted as compulsory for every one, it would have been enough to keep us away. No fences would have been necessary. Today also the conditions have not changed. For the Managing Committee also it will be a test as to its ability of taking or not taking deserving people. It is also possible that due to its ignorance, the Managing Committee may prevent people better than their own members from joining the Ashram. But the remedy for this can only be that the reins of the Managing Committee are in your hands. 'There is fault in every system' is correctly said by Tolstoy.

The question of service to women is difficult. We are not stupid enough, by your grace, to understand that your basis for a common kitchen and the rule for celibacy is the protection of

widows There is no doubt that the rigours of widowhood and self-restraint could be lightened if we create an atmosphere of restraint around them. Why do couples who dread to go to the common kitchen not think, what a dreadful condition it must be for the widows? This whole situation is good enough as an ideal But just as we cherish an ideal to live like the poorest of the poor and yet cannot do so and are miles away from it, it could be ideal for us married people to give up all the pleasures and advantages that our widowed sisters do not get, such a situation is not possible. Congratulations to those men and women who can reach that ideal by becoming ascetics But we must know our limitations If those widows want to collectively manage a kitchen, or an institution, they may do so; or they may stay with couples who make them happy; or take their meals in the common kitchen for men; there is no other way out of this

The question of service to a married woman away from her husband arises only when her husband is an animal. In those circumstances we can forcibly protect her But in our society the question of such protection of married women does not arise It is advisable to see that every husband at our place should practise self-restraint and learn to serve and educate his wife. The husband is the ideal teacher for the wife. That is what you have said somewhere We must bring about that condition.

Otherwise for the total service of women of any age or in any condition, a middle-aged and capable person who has dedicated his life to service of women is needed If a suitable person who has dedicated his life is not found for all activities of the Ashram, we cannot undertake that activity. And so we do not feel that there is separate activity of service to women in the Ashram for the present

This letter is lengthy but it gives you a picture of our thoughts. We have taken for granted that you would be neutral regarding the Ashram system whilst expressing criticism and doubt regarding it If you wish to keep the whole movement in your charge, you can do what you like with it.

In spite of the complete desire to surrender to your experience as a person with ideal self-restraint, the new management suggested by you does not satisfy us, is what we have to tell you with sorrow.

Respects
Narahari-Mahadev.¹²⁹

(Gandhiji wrote in reply to this.)

"That you do not seem to have understood what I meant, shows my own deficiency.

I have never desired force. Persuasion does not mean force.

We have indeed run a communal-kitchen — in a haphazard manner and also have run separate ones

My suggestion is only that, new separate kitchens must be stopped; and we must try to merge the old separate ones into a common one as early as possible.

If there is not even a single common kitchen, can it be called an Ashram? And if there is a common kitchen, who, for what moral reason, would not join it?

My suggestion does not include asceticism as recognised by Hinduism, but a new edition of it is included. But that type is for the married people.

Common kitchen does not preclude all men-women relationships, but those relationships become guiltless. We do not reach the *samata* of Gita till there is a special selfish attraction towards each other.

At the present moment we have not to think whether all the separate kitchens are going to become one or not. But aren't we going to find occasions to make them one?

There is no type of unity among women. The common kitchen is an-instrument for that.

But these are my ideas. We are not going to run either the common kitchen or the Ashram. I am a guest and want, as a guest, to give my experiences to the Ashram for use. The expansion I made during Maganlal's life by which he always registered his opposition but ran it somehow, my effort is to lessen that expansion as much as possible. Think of that effort and do whatever is possible.

Those with families, if you want to discuss this matter with me, please do so. It is good if you put your views before all.

Bapu"³⁰

The Ashram's separate kitchens for men and women did not last long, but the common kitchens continued till the Dandi March in 1930.

On the 10th June 1928, Gandhiji wrote a long article with the caption, "Satyagraha Ashram". In that he explained the aim and activities as well as the rules which included the vows, and also had given the curriculum of the Khadi Vidyalaya. It was also mentioned there that the Ashram was being managed by a Managing Committee

from 24th July 1926. When this article was written, Mahadev was the President, Imam Abdulkader Bavazir as Vice President and Chhaganlal Joshi, the Secretary of the Managing Committee. The members were Vinoba, Narahari and seven others. Among Trustees of the Ashram Mahadev's name was included along with Jamnalalji, Revashankar, Imamsaheb and Chhaganlal Khushalchand Gandhi.

Gandhiji accepted this decision in his own way. He wrote to Mahadev from Kausani where he had gone to complete his book, *Anasaktiyoga*.

"I am dancing in the lap of the Himalayas. And the king of Saints (Himalaya) is full of joy bathing in the rays of the sun donning his white clothes. His contemplation is worth envying. It hurts a little that you are not here to share that envy. But the pain of the hurt subsides as you belong there.

'From today the difficult work of Gita is going to be started.

"Good that you have become the President. You have got to get into such work as well. . . ."³¹

Gandhiji made some changes in the Constitution of Gujarat Vidyapith as well. Mahadev was invited to join its new Managing Committee.

At that time Acharya Kripalani was leaving Gujarat Vidyapith and returning to Uttar Pradesh to take over his constructive work there. Mahadev has given a picturesque description of his farewell party in his diary.

The last sentences of the farewell address of Kripalaniji, noted down by Mahadev are as fresh today sixty-four years later :

"Carry your aims, your hopes and wishes into your future life. Remember, Life may lay any amount of burden on you; consider it as a light burden. Laugh at others' foolishness as well. Your destiny may take you anywhere — to the torture chamber or to the scaffold — I tell you positively that life is worth living."³²

Mahadev's art of becoming a zero took him easily to the innermost virtues of other people. And so he could take in the fiery words of non-violent revolutionary Kripalani as warmly as he did those of the gentle Deenbandhu Andrews. Kripalani's address was delivered on a delicate occasion, but Mahadev prepared the report with such love and care that even a hard task-master like Kripalani gave the permission to print it after reading it through.

We should note here a minor subject before closing this chapter. Mahadev had declared about the art and science of cloth-making from the Agra Jail that he did not believe spinning had to be done because it was sacrosanct. But the same technique of cloth-

making had affected his personality during these five to six years. He had acquired mastery over spinning. Weavers were always ready to weave his fine, uniform yarn of high quality; people around him watched him as if watching an art exhibition when he used to spin. During every Congress Session, he gave equal number of pages in *Navajivan* to the Khadi Exhibition and Spinning Competition as he would to the report of the speeches. And the art of cloth-making had taken hold of his mind to such an extent that it found expression in his language, style of writing as well as in his rhetoric. In the index of the twelfth volume of his diary, the Congress has been mentioned seventeen times, the Ashram twenty-three times, but Khadi had been mentioned fifty-one times.

Mahadev described the style of Gandhiji's address at the Kathiawadi Political Conference in just a sentence thus, "The main resolution Gandhiji discussed in the Conference in such detail that it reminded one of a fine carder separating the smallest fibre of cotton minutely . . ."³³ On the other hand the poet in Mahadev emerged when he wrote about the small Khadi exhibition held during the sixth Raniparaj Conference in small village named Poona in the Gaikwadi Mahuva Taluka. "The other section was of carding. There were samples of cotton carded with thick, thin and medium-sized catgut, and along with all these samples, there was a sample of cotton every fibre of which was separated, cleaned and carded with hand — resembling an autumn cloud."³⁴ ♦

During these days Mahadev did not seem to write many love letters of separation to Gandhiji as he was busy running about all the time and living closely with Bardoli's peasants. But it did seem that Gandhiji felt Mahadev's absence. Gandhiji wrote to a number of people that Mahadev had gone to Bardoli. When the well known journalist, Sadanand, sent a copy of an article to Gandhiji, supposed to have been written by him, he wrote to Sadanand, "I have your letter with a copy of my so called contribution to the Anglo-American Newspaper Service. I have sent nothing to the Service on the topic mentioned in this copy. But on going through the copy sent by you, I observe that it is an indifferently taken newspaper report of a speech I delivered in Colombo during my Ceylon visit. A fairly good report of that speech appears in Mahadev's booklet on the Ceylon tour."³⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. M. D., *The Story of Bardoli*, pp. 262-63
2. M. D. *Bardoli Satyagraha-no-Itihas*, p. 4, Preface (Guj.)
3. *CWMG* - 36, p. 47

4. Ibid. p. 51
5. Ibid. p. 92
6. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-Patro* - 4, p. 217 (Guj.)
7. M. D., *Bardoli Satyagraha-no-Itihas* p. 4, Preface (Guj.)
8. M. D., *The Story of Bardoli*, pp. 104 to 106 (Selected)
9. Ibid.
10. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. 1, p. 318
11. M. D., *The Story of Bardoli*, p. 257
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid. pp. 258 to 261 (both inclusive)
14. Ibid pp 260-61
15. *M. D. 's Diary* - 12, pp. 148 to 151 (Guj.)
16. M. D., *The Story of Bardoli*, p. 323
17. M. D., *Bardoli Satyagraha-no-Itihas*, p. 299 (Guj.)
18. *M. D.'s Diary* - 12, p. 146 (Guj.)
19. Ibid. pp. 138 to 141 (Guj.)
20. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai* - 1, p. 417 (Guj.)
21. *CWMG* - 42, p. 242
22. Ibid. p. 254
23. *M. D.'s Diary* - 12, p. 17 (Guj.)
24. Ibid , p. 18 (Guj.)
25. Ibid. pp 45-46 (Guj.)
26. Ibid. pp. 109-10 (Guj.)
27. A short excerpt from Prabhudas Gandhi's letter from Rajkot in answer to some questions with reference to '*Agnikund man Ugelun Gulab* (Guj.)
28. Ibid
29. *CWMG* - 36 pp. 303 to 400
30. *M. D.'s Diary* - 12, pp. 114 to 23 (Guj.)
31. Letter No. 11453 from the hand-written correspondence of Gandhi Museum.
32. *M. D.'s Diary* - 12 pp 55 to 57 (Guj.)
33. Ibid. p. 28 (Guj)
34. Ibid. p. 112 (Guj.)
35. *CWMG* - 36 p. 392

CHAPTER XXVIII

SELF-PURIFICATION — PREPARATION FOR SATYAGRAHA

The successful Satyagraha of Bardoli was one of the landmarks for the non-violent fight for freedom. Its effect was felt in every corner of the country but its field of activity was limited. Sardar Patel had purposely kept it limited to Bardoli and had kept it separate from the wider non-co-operation movement. So much so that even when stalwart Satyagrahis like Rajaji and Gangadharrao Deshpande came to meet Gandhiji at Sabarmati and expressed a desire to go to Bardoli, Gandhiji persuaded them not to do so. The adversaries also considered it as a question regarding Bombay Government's land revenue policy. The Central Government did take interest in it. And it was discussed even in England, but in the context of the farmers of a taluka of the Government of Bombay Province.

Most of the non-violent movements for Swarajya were limited ones. Champaran, the struggle of the Textile Workers, Kheda Satyagraha, Nagpur struggle and Vykom all fell into this category. In the Nagpur struggle, the reason for the struggle was confined to a narrow sphere, but Satyagrahis from outside the province had proceeded there. In the Vykom Satyagraha, Satyagrahis from Kerala and Tamilnadu had also participated. In the Bardoli Satyagraha no one from outside Gujarat was involved. Thus Bardoli Satyagraha was one which was limited to its specific field, specific reason and was conducted by a people of a specific area. And so we can consider it as the laboratory for future all India Satyagrahas.

The first condition of working in this laboratory was that the scientist should be fully prepared. Mahadev knew this well. Kakasaheb Kalelkar, the Principal of Gujarat Vidyapith, invited Mahadev in spite of his hesitation, to speak before the Graduates' Conference. Mahadev delivered a very serious address after a lot of thought, reflection and introspection. We shall refer to it in detail at the end of this chapter. Mahadev gave this address on the 12th January 1930. The drums for the national movement, anticipated

exactly after three months, had already sounded and Mahadev referred to it in his address. The theme of this address was that "a soldier getting ready for this fierce war should prepare himself for the utmost sacrifice through self-purification."¹

The period from the time of the Bardoli movement to the widespread 1930 struggle was a period for the nation's comprehensive preparation and for Mahadev it was one for achieving self-purification by keeping in step with the widespread preparations.

There was popular opposition to the Simon Commission throughout the country. During that resistance many senior and junior soldiers had put up with police oppression with a smile. Many had put up with lathi-charges. Jawaharlal's aged mother had been pushed about by the police. 'On the 30th October prominent leaders like Lala Lajpatrai, the Lion of Punjab, were beaten in the chest with rifle-butts, which resulted in such a sickness that Lalaji died on 17th November 1926.'²

The Congress had tried its level best to unite the nation on the point of asking for Dominion Status. And the Nehru Committee's Report under the leadership of Motilal Nehru was accepted by and large by the national leaders. Before that there were sharp differences between the tried leaders and the young workers about what the aim of the Congress should be, 'Complete Independence or Dominions Status'.¹ Among those who insisted on going ahead with complete independence as the goal was Jawaharlal who had just returned after a tour of Europe and Subhash Chandra Bose and his comrades from Bengal gave him solid support. On the other hand the main supporter of Dominion Status was Motilal who was supported by some other leaders. When the A.I.C.C. met at Calcutta to discuss this very question, Gandhiji played the role of bringing about a compromise between the two sides. Of course, Subhash did not leave a good impression when he opposed the decision of compromise in the open session, even though he had given his consent to it on the previous day in the meeting of the Subjects Committee. The compromise decision adopted in the open session was to ask the Government to give India, 'Dominion Status' within one year, and if it was not conferred by the 31st December 1929, to declare the aim of the Congress to be complete independence from the first day of 1930, and start a movement for the same. The year 1929 was considered as the year for the preparation for that movement. The Congress made efforts to strengthen its organisations at various places. On the other hand there were sporadic incidents of violence. Committees were formed for the promotion of Khadi,

removal of untouchability, communal harmony and other constructive programmes, and by those committees much was done.

Chandulal Bhagubhai Dalal who was very particular about the dates of Mahadev's diaries of that period had noted down that Mahadev spent 450 days out of 514 days, away from Gandhiji in 1928-29.³

Mahadev was in Bardoli for quite some time during the Bardoli Satyagraha. He went to Simla with Sardar and Swami Anand and wrote the first part of Bardoli Satyagraha. Then he acted as the people's representative before the Inquiry Committee. After his success in Bardoli, Vallabhbhai was in great demand all over the country. He had taken Gandhiji's permission to have Mahadev with him during the long tours of South India and Bihar. Sardar always talked about Gandhiji wherever he went, which was a matter of satisfaction and joy to Mahadev. It is said about Hanuman that he was so fond of the story of Rama that he went wherever it was being recited. Mahadev's attitude was similar where Gandhiji's story was concerned. So Mahadev was immensely interested in reporting the speeches of Vallabhbhai which were full of Gandhian thought. Mahadev always experienced Gandhiji's proximity through his mind and soul, though physically he was far from him.

Mahadev's talk of preparing oneself for pure sacrifice through self-purification was not only meant for the Vidyapith graduates. The revolution of the Satyagrahi begins with one's own self. And so Mahadev was thinking and reflecting always about self-purification. The tours with Vallabhbhai were less arduous than those with Gandhiji. During the tours with Gandhiji, there had to be notes for the interview over and above those of the speeches. In the tours with Sardar only the gist of the lectures used to suffice, and the correspondence was also much less. Mahadev used to be free from the responsibility of explaining Gandhiji's thoughts to different listeners or readers in various styles because Sardar himself explained them in a simple rustic style.

And so Mahadev could get some time for his reflection as well as for writing love letters to Gandhiji. Even to Durga he must have written two to three letters a week, but unfortunately for us, retaining those letters in her heart Durga had destroyed them and so we do not have the opportunity of glancing at the corner of their hearts. The sacrificial offering in the form of letters to the third aim of that love-triangle — Gandhiji, has remained with us, excerpts from which may be noted as witnesses to Mahadev's efforts at self purification. Initially we will note Mahadev's writing and thoughts and then relate them to Gandhiji's correspondence.

Mahadev believed that the flames of the sacrifice for purification lit in 1921 should become more radiant and purifying in 1929-30. He also believed that the atmosphere of violence prevalent in the country could be combated only through pure non-violence.

Self-purification begins with honesty. The basis of morality or ethics is also honesty. Some of the rules of ethics or morality may change according to the time and place and they should keep on changing, but one ethical principle never changes any where, at any time, — and that is truth. That is why Mahadev tried to keep his heart, pure and clear as crystal by testing it in the matter of truth. He was never prepared to compromise even an iota regarding truth. Whilst travelling by train to Delhi from Lahore, during a discussion with a young man, he was prepared to be flexible about the question of violence and non-violence, but not in the matter of honesty.

"I do not want to comment on your methods, but I cannot tolerate your dishonesty. You may believe in violence and in activities which bring about chaos, but I ask that you should also believe in honesty."⁴

An excerpt from a letter written to Gandhiji from the train on 2nd December 1929 :

"I got up at four though I slept at one or one-thirty at night. Said my prayers. (Please do not believe that always during travel I get up at four and say my prayers because I have written about it) When God is kind and wakes me up, I write to you. And when I read Gita quietly I go on thinking about some verse, and it keeps resounding the whole day. Today it is the following verse :

'Even though thou be the most sinful of sinners,
Thou shalt cross the ocean of sin by the boat of
knowledge.'

(Gita-Discourse IV - Verse 36)⁵

"When there was a discussion with Kaka whilst reading your translation, the above was one of the subjects for discussion . . . In the Gita and Upanishad there is a theory that one can overcome sin through knowledge. Plato's old theory is 'virtue is knowledge'. How similar is this theory to that? Or does it not match at all? The word *vriyam* in the verse does not fit my explanation, but this morning I got its explanation thus: Our *gnana* (knowledge) and Plato's knowledge are not the same. 'Knowledge' has been defined further on by the writer of the Gita. (I am not talking of the elaborate definition of the 13th discourse) But in this discourse, it is said, 'There is nothing in this world so purifying as Knowledge and the 'Knowledge' can be attained through propriety and over a time:

and that too only by 'a man of faith, by one who is intent on it and who has mastery over his senses'⁶ This clarification has removed the falacy of the word '*vrijin*'. But then how can these words be called the promise of God to the most sinful of sinners? When can a sinner become a man of faith? When can he become controlled in senses? When can he become intent?

"Now we may take the promise of the 9th discourse :

'A sinner, however great, if he turns to Me with undivided devotion, must indeed be counted a saint; for he has a settled resolve.'

(Gita-IX - V. No. 30)

"Here it is not said to be released through knowledge, but through devotion. Could a man, 'fully evil' swiftly become a devotee with unfailing devotion? And yet in the other verse there is '*kshipram*' like the '*vrijin*' in the first verse. If an evil man can become a pious person, then how far justified is your saying that an adulterer should commit suicide or that a man who breaks a vow can commit suicide? In the promise of the Lord, 'My devotee does not perish', I perceive the meaning 'One who is devoted to Me does not need to commit suicide even if he was an evil man once.' The meaning of the word *pranashyati* (is destroyed) is not destruction, but by the word is meant suicide, and we can link it up with what you say, thus 'that if an evil man does not turn to devotion, he is bound to be destroyed, or his only way is suicide, but if by God's grace he is taken into His care he does not have to resort to suicide. Is my understanding correct?

"And yet a doubt remains about the meaning of the word *kshipra*. It can mean 'by the time'.

"Your statement that Gita is the life's dictionary is found to be true at every step, but very often deep thinking over it also does not stop a fall. Only there is a burning torment after the fall. What about that?

"The things you said in the Working Committee this time, are still echoing in my ears. It is absolutely correct that man measures others by his own weaknesses. 'A man in anguish harms the whole village' would only mean the same."

In another letter to Gandhiji, written the next day from the Sadakat Ashram, Patna, Mahadev continued to express his thought process :

"This morning I repeatedly sang a *bhajan*. I had discussed the Gita yesterday — in continuation of which I am asking this question :

'Elephant and Vulture and a prostitute were redeemed,

And even the passionate evil Ajamil.'

"Would all these have got salvation after the very lives in which they committed sins and wicked deeds? Would they have 'become righteous and attained everlasting peace?' Or in the Hindi words 'Taari Hai' (तारी है VX) only mean that they were rescued from wickedness and turned towards devotion to the Lord?

"Today I found the following verses for discussion :

'The Lord creates neither agency nor action for the world; neither does He connect action with its fruit. It is nature that is at work.

'The Lord does not take upon himself anyone's vice or virtue; it is ignorance that veils knowledge and deludes all creatures.'

(Gita V - Verses No. 14/15)⁹

"And yet :

'Knowing Me as the Acceptor of sacrifice and austerity, the great Lord of all the worlds, the friend of all creation, the *yogi* attains to peace.'

(Gita V - Verse No. 29)¹⁰

"How would it be if some disappointed man discovers atheism from the first verse and the latter half of the second? The Lord is neither bothered with sin nor with the righteous; He only allows nature to prevail.

'The moving finger writes and having writ
Moves on, nor all thy piety and wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all thy tears wash a word out of it.'

"— this atheism of Omar Khayyam seems to echo from the verses of the Gita. And yet the Lord describes Himself as the 'Friend of all living beings'. If He allows only nature to prevail, and just watches sin and virtue from afar, how can He be a Friend of all living beings? And what is that wretched nature?

"Please do not get fed up if I go on writing such letters! Over and above the edition of the Gita, if you write a series of articles on Gita, these letters may be useful. The twenty questions that occurred to me during reading the Gita with Kaka, are still lying with him. This is the result of getting engrossed in the Gita during the prayers."¹¹

Once again in a letter without date from Sadakat Ashram Mahadev expresses his vexation

"The latter part of the third discourse has always confused me. 'Then what impels man to sin?' Does the answer to this

question not sound cryptic ? What can a great sinner learn from that verse ? The analysis of sin does not seem as deep as it should be, and there are no words like repentance and atonement in the Gita. What is the reason for that ? Were both the things not acceptable to the author of the Gita ? It is clearly stated in the sixth discourse, 'O Kaunteya, it can be held in check by constant practice and dispassion.' (Gita VI - Verse No. 35). How could the ignorant think of practice or dispassion ? And how can they achieve it ? Must the statement, 'If he turns to Me with undivided attention', (Gita IX Verse No. 30), be for such ignorant people ?"¹²

Excerpts from a letter written from Shambhubabu's residence in Patna on 5th December 1929 and one from Bhagalpur on 6th December 1929, may be taken here :

"I am getting some answers to the questions I raised and the questions that keep on cropping up. An evil man became pious if he adopted undivided devotion. But when can he pray with such devotion ? I got the answer today in the following verse of the seventh discourse :

'But those virtuous men whose sin has come to an end, freed from the delusion of the opposites, worship Me in steadfast faith.'

(Gita VII - Verse No. 28)

"Only he can pray steadfastly whose sins have ended. Till the sins have not ended — the root of passion, anger, greed and delusion of mind is not destroyed, even the man who prays to the Lord cannot tread the path of piety."¹³

"This morning, I sang the *bhajan*, 'Oh Lord ! Fickle is my mind', it said,

'The Lord is there in everyone; I did not know or see.'

"I was constantly thinking over it, and considering the mention in the Gita of all the powers and many forms of God I went on asking myself this question : Suppose a woman undergoes a lot of oppression, if some scoundrel rapes her, if that woman in consciousness believes that scoundrel to be a fiend and a devil how can she believe that even in that fiend 'the Lord is always there ?' I believe that if there is place for violence, if it is to be allowed anywhere, it could be tried in the utter destruction of the fiends who sully chastity and that too in a disinterested manner; they can be killed with the following thought, 'I am destroying the body of that fiend and if there is God in him I am releasing Him from a sinful body.'

"I have put most disarranged thought in an equally disarranged manner. But you always understand the pith of my

silly, stupid thoughts and hence my question. 'The Lord is always there in everyone' is a big problem."¹⁴

Along with this deep reflection and inquisitiveness Mahadev's constant stance of devotion was always present. And so at the end of self-study on the 2nd December 1929, he wrote: "If you do not have time to reply, don't reply. I won't wait intently for it."¹⁵ But he is anxious to meet him. Most probably, two days later, he wrote in an undated letter: "I am trying to persuade Vallabhbhai to let me come to Wardha instead of his taking me to Surat. Most probably I shall come."¹⁶

Then as he is not content with his own effort he asks for his beloved's help on the 5th: "How nice it would be, if you drop a line to Vallabhbhai to send me to Wardha!"¹⁷

Gandhiji had sent Mahadev with Vallabhbhai with full understanding, during Bardoli Satyagraha. But then he found it tough to spare Mahadev for four to five days. Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev on 3rd February 1930, a day of silence:

"Vallabhbhai himself had said four to five days. The skies may fall, but you have to be present here on the 12th. Your work is to prepare others, isn't it? If you have left today, you have to return on the 8th according to my calculations."¹⁸

Gandhiji wrote to Andrews when Mahadev had gone to Simla after the Bardoli Satyagraha:

"Mahadev is returning today from Simla. I am glad he had a little bit of rest and detachment from the routine work. In Simla, of course, he wrote the chapters for his forthcoming book on Bardoli. Vallabhbhai too is returning today from Simla, as also Swami. They were all, however, fed up with the Simla atmosphere."¹⁹

Again in October 1929 Gandhiji heard that Mahadev was unwell. He immediately wrote:

"I cannot bear you falling ill. I hope you have completely recovered by now. One must observe moderation even in serving, and it will probably help you to render good service if you follow the maxim, '*Dharma* without risking one's health.' We have, of course, the Englishman's experience in the saying, 'He enjoys the greatest leisure, who works the hardest', and that is true indeed. Its point is that, one who had done his duty sincerely is entitled to some rest. No one has the right to encroach on that much-needed rest."²⁰

Mohan and Mahadev's love was from both sides. Its final aim was to achieve oneness. But Mahadev, a worshipper of non-duality felt like tasting the sweetness of dualism. He wrote from Tamil Nadu, where he had gone with Vallabhbhai:

"When I got the opportunity of travelling with Gandhiji in different provinces of India, very often I wished to be one of the crowd of people, instead of one of the entourage, as to how lovely it would be to have his *darshan* and shout '*Mahatma Gandhiki Jai!*' I used to envy those crowds which adored him. I wanted to experience the emotions felt by the people, I wanted to share the onrush of feelings of their minds"²¹

In describing his journeys with Vallabhbhai, Mahadev experienced the same excitement he felt while describing his journeys with Gandhiji. Because Vallabhbhai was extremely humble, after the Bardoli victory, he always introduced himself as Gandhiji's soldier.

When Mahadev perceived Vallabhbhai's meetings packed with thousands of young people eager to hear and to keep on hearing Vallabhbhai, he felt like becoming one of the audience, but he could not do so as he was with the Sardar. He calls this a 'bondage'.

"I would have liked it very much if I could write this report as one of the thousands of students come to listen to Vallabhbhai Patel. . . This is my first visit to this province without Gandhiji, and therefore, when the excitement of his charismatic presence is absent, it has become possible for me to gauge what people think about him and his principles"²²

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari had organised the Tamil Nadu meeting. He was Vallabhbhai's colleague and Mahadev's friend. He wanted to take equal advantage of both the guests. So he had introduced a custom that in the farmers' meetings, Mahadev would relate about the Bardoli Satyagraha and Vallabhbhai would address them and give a message. Mahadev was always prompt in writing about what Vallabhbhai said, but he almost forgot that he himself spoke too. He reported Vallabhbhai's speeches with their gist. He did this work in detail for the *Navajivan* readers during the Bardoli Satyagraha. It was easy to write those reports. He used to echo Sardar's clarion call in Sardar's own effective language. Here the speeches were in English so Mahadev had to translate. Some times the commentator added his line to that of the translator. But the commentator was also an admirer. So he offered an opinion:

"He had rarely spoken outside Bardoli. Today that purposeful silence of years was being broken in a language awakening thousands. He had not read literature. He had not cultivated the art of speaking, had tried to forget English. But when in Madras he started speaking in English — there may have been some grammatical mistakes — the world of English-loving people of Madras experienced the same miracle in the language that the Bardoli peasants experienced in his rustic

Gujarati. The secret of this was in his persistent observance of silence, in his excellent capacity to fight against injustice and in his constantly aflame patriotism. One who has these virtues and has to give a message to the people, did not have to woo the goddess of speech, the goddess of speech runs after and flatters him."²³

Mahadev did not miss giving example of how Sardar's speeches affected the people, whilst reporting them. In Tamil Nadu Sardar relentlessly attacked the antagonistic tendencies between the *brahmins* and the non-*brahmins*. It had a salutary effect on both the groups.

"An old farmer got proper perspective of his understanding and he was so affected by Vallabhbhai's speeches that he joined us on the tour. He went on becoming excessively excited on hearing Vallabhbhai's lectures and went on repeating that such a person, aware of the farmer's woes and waking them up by persuasion, had never been seen before."²⁴

And the speeches were so touching that a *brahmin* gentleman exclaimed, "It is like receiving nectar as well as rain in famine,"²⁵ while one leader-friend said, "We did not realise that Vallabhbhai could speak so well and stir the people up so much,"²⁶

Mahadev was with Vallabhbhai on the Bihar tour as well. He noted down on reaching Bihar:

"Many leaders must be going to Bihar, but the Biharis must not be getting excited about them as they are about Sardar, who went as the best student of Gandhiji, carrying his message about his programme. This was Vallabhbhai's first visit to Bihar. And yet it seemed as if old memories were surfacing on his arrival there. He had received a lot of respect and honour in Tamil Nadu. But the distinction in the receptions of Bihar and the Southern Province was that the respect for Vallabhbhai was like an echo of devotion to Gandhiji. We moved about in many districts of Bihar in fifteen days. Everywhere, thousands of peasants came only to hear Gandhiji's message through a new individual. They came with the faith that this man would rescue them from their troubles as Gandhiji had rescued them at Champaran. In the Tamil Province there was hardly a single address given to Vallabhbhai without mentioning his brother, Vitthalbhai. In the address of Salem it was specifically stated, 'It is difficult to say whose service is greater among you two brothers.' In Bihar none of the citations contained Vitthalbhai's name. The Biharis knew Vitthalbhai's importance but to them it all seemed irrelevant. Their addresses contained only the mention of Gandhiji's

Satyagraha and praise of Vallabhbhai at upholding that message of Satyagraha in the best manner."²⁷

We have mentioned before that Mahadev was Vallabhbhai's admirer because of the latter's devotion to Gandhiji. The speeches that Vallabhbhai gave to the Socialists shouting, 'Long live Revolution' and 'Down with Imperialism' proved the above point :

"First make the revolution successful and then shout slogans about its victory. How can you talk about victory of a thing that is not there ? Yes, you can shout about victory to one revolution. You had a 'revolution' in Champaran. You came to be known nationally and internationally because of that 'revolution'. And the farmer understands its meaning. So if you want a new national slogan go ahead and say 'Victory to Champaran Satyagraha'. No other sound would move the peasants as that one

"And of what 'revolution' are you talking ? You have not brought revolution in your life. You are still sticking to old superstitions and customs, you cannot get rid of the system of *pardah*; you want revolution in the working of schools and colleges, how can you have it ? Where else can you hear the drum-beat of revolution if not in the slogan '*Mahatma Gandhiji ki Jai ?*' Because Mahatmaji is revolution incarnate. . . ." ²⁸

Whether it was for Gandhiji or Vallabhbhai, Mahadev's capability as a reporter of a paper was brilliant. The report may be about the Santhals of Bihar, or about an interview of Poet Rabindranath with Gandhiji at the Sabarmati Ashram or it may be presenting old and new opinions of foreign experts on Khadi, the genius was the same. But he was not only a reporter. Along with reporting he went on analysing political, social and economic conditions. Mahadev's fine analytical intellect was evident from his analysis of the Bihar tour. Along with all this, his leadership quality was seen in the way he guided the reader in a definite direction by his writings. The language of the Gita which was under regular study, also was often expressed in Mahadev's journalistic language. Regarding the spread of prohibition in Jabalpur district, Mahadev said :

" . . . Whatever it may be but the work for purification never goes in vain. There is no end to the beginning, no obstacle comes in the way, and even a little recourse to it saves us from great danger."²⁹

During the year of preparation for the nation-wide non-violent movement, Mahadev emerged as one of the leaders. Gandhiji had, in this year, once again occupied the national political stage, having raised the constructive programme and stated out the problems of the

Ashram. He was the chief actor on the stage since the resolution passed at the Lahore Congress handed over the leadership of the civil disobedience movement to him. Before that he was one of the foremost leaders. Mahadev was known as Gandhiji's personal secretary but he was as much an adviser to Gandhiji. He took Mahadev's advice when the question as to who should be the Congress President for 1930 was discussed. Naturally enough Mahadev suggested Sardar's name. But as Gandhiji did not want to make him the Congress President merely on the strength of the victory at Bardoli, he wrote to Mahadev :

"I do not agree with what you have written about Vallabhbhai. It would appear as if we are cashing in by making him the President. All the same, we will think about it as you all have to come to Lucknow. I am not thinking of it at all. 'By consigning the mind into the Self, no thinking need be done.' God will come to our aid at that time."³⁰

Gandhiji's name also had been suggested for that post, but he did not accept it. And Vallabhbhai slipped off saying, "How can I, a soldier, dare to go, where the commander does not go?"

Mahadev appeared more as a leader who understood the national situation and who led the people on the Gandhian path. This comes out well in the description of the Lahore Congress and in the description of tours after that. In an article "A Curse of a Saint" Mahadev gave the commentary on the pledge for complete independence, formulated by Gandhiji according to the resolution of the Lahore Congress — a pledge that was reiterated in the whole country on the 26th January of every year thereafter. Mahadev interpreted this in an article called "The Curse of an Ascetic".

In Lahore many people had been rowdy, some had presented old arguments against non-violence. Mahadev admitted all this in *Navajivan* :

"In many respects Lahore Congress can be called 'unprecedented'. To describe its multiple colours, peace, patience and absence of anger is required. So I think it is better to be silent at this point of time. Because all the three feelings are absent at the time of writing this."³²

But by the time the issue of *Navajivan* came out on 9th February 1930, he had outgrown the agitation about the provocative elements in the Congress. And his righteous anger flared up. The headings of the article for the supporters in India of the British and the English papers was "May You Depart". This was as if a prior indication of Gandhiji's clarion call of 'Quit India' given twelve years later. The last three lines of the article indicated the sentiment of the whole article :

"In short, India calls out to Britain : 'You may go, bag and baggage, you need not worry about us. Our condition would be no worse than it is now, perhaps it might improve !'"³³

Only regarding Mahadev's one assertion it could be said that in asserting what he did, he described the existence of a virtue, but it is difficult to say that it was a definite prophecy when we consider the later history. When Mahadev wrote he had the memories of the Congress in his mind :

"The resolution was passed, and the next day a farmer from Basti entered Gandhiji's tent. He had come to ask Gandhiji some questions. As Gandhiji was not there, he sat down shivering near the fire and started asking, 'Have we got Swaraj? Has Nehru's son become the king? Has the big Viceroy gone from the throne of Delhi?' He, poor thing, really believed that Jawaharlal would go straight to Delhi from Lahore, bid farewell to the Viceroy and sit on the throne! He didn't know that Jawaharlal neither likes kings nor the throne!"³⁴

Discussing the political events of this period we have diverted us from the topic introduced earlier in this chapter. Self purification. Mahadev had considered self-purification as an unavoidable condition for the nation-wide struggle for freedom. The words 'sin' and 'repentance' may not be there in the Gita, a fact which had rather surprised Mahadev; nevertheless, he himself believed the royal road to self-purification was confession to the society of one's mistakes, heart-felt repentance for the same, firm resolve not to err and humble prayers to God for help to carry out that resolve.

During this period Mahadev wrote fictional story, "Master Vajubhai".³⁵ In that the main character tells a guileless student Ramnik, "It is all right, when you have confessed your offence, you must now believe that God has forgiven you. That is why you underwent such a lot of repentance. Your tears have washed off your offence."³⁶ Mahadev's own belief about sin and faith in repentance was expressed in this statement.

During this very period Mahadev has noted down in details Gandhiji and Vinoba's profound thoughts about prayers. Mahadev felt elated at Gandhiji's every utterance and he had taken every word of it to heart. A few sentences are given :

"If you have to ask for something from God it has to relate to our self-purification. Cleaning of the soul and searching for it is prayer. The soul is within us in an unconscious state. It is weighed down under a number of layers of darkness and ignorance. Through prayer we are removing the weight layer by layer, and so the man who believes in the

awakening of the soul, for him prayer is the greatest strength."³⁷

Mahadev had to become the President of the Graduates' Conference in Ahmedabad on 12th January 1930, on Kakasaheb's order, in spite of his reluctance. The presidential address was not given out of an onrush of feelings. That address was prepared and presented after a lot of thought as a confession to society of his mistake. It was only a devotee of the man who worshipped truth, and the translator of *The Experiments with Truth*, who could make this confession. Let us consider the end of the address :

"Please forgive me if I mention a personal matter at the time of talking about self-purification. If every one of us asks oneself in a moment of peace and understanding, why Swarajya has not been achieved, there would be a clear answer, 'Because, you are unclean. You have not made any preparations for Swarajya.' Our fight for freedom is different from other freedom struggles in the world. Such struggles in the world were violent ones, they depended on the capacity of the soldiers to kill and being killed, sometimes, the struggles depended not on soldiers, but on the capacity of destruction of one people by other people with the strength of weapons, men and chemical poisons. Our struggle is a righteous struggle, and so the success of it depends on the purity of every constituent of that struggle. Whenever I thought about myself, these thoughts pricked me. I always thought that staying in Satyagraha Ashram I had displayed laxity in the most important vows of Truth and Celibacy, but I had not done any self-purification by confessing that laxity and breach of the vows. Today I have purified myself by confessing my sins with a view to have a share, if only by this confession, in the attainment of Swarajya which would come as a result of the great struggle that is going to take place next year. One of the women among you was also tremendously transgressing the vow of Truth. Having realised it, though late, she collected herself, confessed her fault and purified herself. I would not feel any embarrassment or reserve in giving greater description of both these self-purifications, but at times pride might be suspected in such confessions and so to save myself from that and not to shock an unknown audience I would not go into details. I am only taking an opportunity of warning you by describing my imperfections and my efforts at self-purification, because you have made a raw recruit like myself, your President. If one is not ashamed of committing a sin, there should be no shame felt at confessing the sin. There cannot be such a lot of harm in accepting a sin as there is in committing it. Man like Gandhi, Augustin or Rousseau, who

accept their sins openly and without pride before the world, are rare, but all can wash their sins by confessing them before the kindred people, whom one has cheated by hiding one's own sins. Tolstoy has said that one who does not forgive a sinner on his confession of sins, has to be forgiven by the Lord.

"I had no intention of discussing the philosophy of sin and its confession at the end of this rather extended address. I wrote it as it just came to my mind. The realisation of my fault in hesitating to accept the Presidentship today was also troubling me. That Kakasaheb insisted on it in spite of my fault indicated his generosity. The very fact that I am standing before you in spite of being guilty, is an answer to that generosity. And thus talking about myself, I would request every man and woman eager for the future struggle that they must examine their hearts to be ready for the purest sacrifice and go in for true self-purification. We would get half the Swarajya in that very self-purification."³⁸

FOOTNOTES

1. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 143 (Guj.)
2. Chandulal B. Dalal, *Gandhiji-ni-Dinvari*, p. 242
3. *Ibid*, Preface, p. 6
4. *Ibid*, p. 128
5. *M. D.*, *The Gita According to Gandhi*, Dis. 4-V - 36, p. 209
6. *Ibid*, Dis-4-V - 39, p. 212
7. *Ibid*, Dis-9-V-30, p. 276
8. *M. D.'s Diary*-13, pp. 76 to 78 (Guj.)
9. *Ibid*, pp.78-79; *M. D.*, *Gita According to Gandhi*, p. 219
10. *Ibid*, p. 79 (Guj.) *Ibid*, p. 226
11. *Ibid*, (Guj.) pp. 78-79 (inclusive of 9-10)
12. *Ibid*, p. 80 (Guj.)
13. *Ibid*, pp. 80-81 (Guj.)
14. *Ibid*, pp. 81-82 (Guj.)
15. *Ibid*, p. 78 (Guj.)
16. *Ibid*, p. 80 (Guj.)
17. *Ibid*, p. 81 (Guj.)
18. *Ibid*, p. 164 (Guj.)
19. *CWMG* - 37, p. 291
20. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 52 (Guj.), *CWMG* - 42, p. 62
21. *Ibid*, p. 4 (Guj.)
22. *Ibid*, p. 4 (Guj.)
23. *Ibid*, pp. 16-17 (Guj.)
24. *Ibid*, p. 24 (Guj.)
25. *Ibid*, p. 26 (Guj.)
26. *Ibid*, p. 16 (Guj.)

27. Ibid, p. 83 (Guj.)
28. Ibid, p. 85
29. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, pp. 51-52 (Guj)
30. Ibid, pp. 35-36 (Guj.)
31. Ibid, p. 40 (Guj)
32. Ibid, p. 110 (Guj.)
33. Ibid, p. 169 (Guj.)
34. Ibid, p. 117 (Guj.)
35. This story was printed in the issue of 17-11-29 of *Shikshan ane Sahitya*.
36. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 67 (Guj.)
37. Ibid, p. 152 (Guj.)
38. Ibid, pp. 143 to 145 (Guj)

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SALT MARCH

The Salt Satyagraha of 1930 was an extremely important chapter in the history of the non-violent struggle for freedom of the country. Before this the nation had never tried the experiment of non-violent resistance on a country-wide scale. You cannot find a parallel of this in the history of the entire world. In the history of India, non-violence was never so active or successful before or after that Satyagraha. Gujarat was at the centre of the struggle. Mahadev occupied the place next to Gandhiji in the Gujarat Movement.

Sardar Patel who had been the leader of one struggle after another, each of excellent calibre, had been arrested by the Government before the Dandi March. Gandhiji was free during the whole of the march and a few days after it. Gandhiji had unofficially handed over to Mahadev the work of the formation of different groups in Gujarat. Other leaders were active on their own fronts. Mahadev was in Ahmedabad, but he was also looking after the centres outside Ahmedabad.

Strategically arresting Vallabhbhai and leaving Gandhiji free was a twofold mistake. There was agitation in the atmosphere before the movement because of Sardar's arrest and that agitation intensified day by day because Gandhiji was free, and the enthusiasm of the people was used in a best advantage in the right direction from the point of view of the non-violent movement.

Mahadev had advantage of both the situations. He used the arrest of Sardar as an ace-reporter of the movement, and as a seasoned leader gave a province-wise character to the Commanders' strategy. Let us view these days closely.

The nation was watching Gandhiji from the time the reins of the national civil disobedience movement were handed over to him during the Lahore Congress. Everyone, not only his supporters, but even his opponents and somewhat neutral newspapers as well as news agencies, were very keen to know what strategy he was going

to evolve and what issue he would pick up to launch the national movement. Members of the C.I.D. and representatives of national and international newspapers started frequenting the Ashram.

The first step to prepare the nation for the struggle was the country-wide public repetition of the pledge of complete independence on the 26th January. The pledge was drafted by Gandhiji. Mahadev's article, "The Curse of an Ascetic", published in *Navajivan* on the 23rd February, was a powerful commentary on this national pledge. In that commentary he linked up the economic, social, and political conditions prevailing in the country at that time with the history of the national struggle. Thousands of people must have given speeches on the pledge in their own circles after the 26th January. Mahadev's commentary would have been helpful to many speakers.

The definite cause for civil disobedience was not yet made public. But before starting any movement, Gandhiji had sent his eleven demands to the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, through a letter sent with Bomanji at Bombay. Bomanji had taken the responsibility of delivering the letter. These points presented the solid programme of what could immediately be accomplished in the demand for freedom. Those points in short, according to Gandhiji, were :

1. Total Prohibition;
2. Reduction of ratio of the rupee to 1s. 4d.;
3. Reduction of the land revenue by at least 5% and making it subject to Legislative control;
4. Abolition of the Salt Tax;
5. Reduction of the military expenditure by at least 50% to begin with.
6. Reduction of the salaries of the higher grade service to one half or less so as to suit the reduced revenue;
7. Protective tariff on foreign cloth;
8. The passage of the Coastal Traffic Reservation Bill;
9. Discharge of all political prisoners, save those condemned for murder or attempt threat, by the ordinary judicial tribunal, withdrawal of all political prosecutions, abrogation of Section 124 A, the Regulation of 1818 and the like, the permission to all the Indian exiles to return;
10. Abolition of C.I.D. or alternatively its popular control; and
11. Issue of licences to use firearms for self-defence, subject to popular control."¹

Gandhiji's sense of strategy made him adopt one of the eleven points to begin the civil disobedience movement. All the Satyagrahas

till then had been conducted on specific issues. The world did not know which issue Gandhiji would take up this time. The newspapermen kept on asking him about it. But Gandhiji did not advocate any definite programme till he was inspired about it. Some impatient Satyagrahi soldiers were anxious about it. Some critics thought it was Gandhiji's diplomacy in not giving out the programme. Some aver that Mahadev suggested the breach of Salt Law to Gandhiji. But all the evidence about this indicated that Gandhiji thought about it intuitively. Pandit Motilal was in doubt as to how it would be possible to challenge such a powerful Government by lifting a handful of salt. He was upset and wrote a letter about it to Gandhiji. Gandhiji calmly replied, "Try it and see!" Motilal got more upset. But as the Congress had given the leadership of this programme to Gandhiji, adhering to discipline, Motilal gave a notice to the Government that he would lift illegal salt on a particular day at a particular time. The police started knocking at Pandit Motilal's doors in the morning itself on the appointed day. Motilal merely wrote a postcard to Gandhiji before going to jail, "I have seen it even before trying." This story has been given merely to indicate how apparently unattractive the programme was, and yet it had tremendous capacity to agitate the Government.

Gandhiji gave for the last time the reasons for starting the programme to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in a detailed letter on 2nd March. Firstly he explained that he did not want to harm a single Englishman, although he believed that the British Government was a nuisance. He described the reasons, which could be counted on finger-tips, that made the British Government a curse. He did this very effectively :

"It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration which the country can never afford

"It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture. And by the policy of cruel disarmament, it has degraded us spiritually. Lacking the inward strength, we have been reduced by all but universal disarmament, to a state bordering on cowardly helplessness."²

Gandhiji's language was full of humility. But he did not hesitate to express the facts. For instance he specifically said

"The iniquities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstrably the most expensive in the world. Take your own salary. It is over Rs. 21,000/- per month, besides many other indirect additions. The British Prime Minister gets \$5,000/- per year, i.e. over Rs. 5,400/- per month at the present rate of exchange. You are

getting over Rs 700/- per day against India's average income of less than annas 2 per day. The Prime Minister gets Rs 180/- per day against Great Britain's average income of Rs. 2/- per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income. On bended knees I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon. I have taken a personal illustration to drive home a painful truth. I have too great a regard for you as a man to hurt your feelings."

Towards the end of the letter he said :

"I know that in embarking on non-violence I shall be running what might fairly be termed a mad risk. But the victories of truth have never been won without risks, often of the gravest character. Conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously preyed upon another, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk.

"If we want to sever the British connection it is because of such evils. When they are removed, the path becomes easy. Then the way to friendly negotiation will be open. If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognising our independence. I respectfully invite you then to pave the way for immediate removal of those evils, and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only in promoting common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging terms of mutual help and commerce equally suited to both."³

Gandhiji had suggested to Reginald Reynolds to read the letter and to deliver it only if he agreed with it. In the Ashram Reginald was called Angad. The Viceroy's Secretary sent a very rude reply to Gandhiji's letter. Gandhiji said, "I asked for bread and received a stone instead!"

A lot of changes took place in the country's atmosphere during the two and a half months between the Lahore Congress and the Dandi March. Incidents of sporadic violence took place in the country. Gandhiji saw only one way to combat that — to offer himself in the non-violent struggle. At the age of sixty one, Gandhiji could speed up the non-violent movement by slowing down the violent elements through a national struggle. His training of about 15 years after his return to India came in useful for this work. The leaders he had trained could play their part with ability. Thousands of new soldiers joined and were trained.

Mahadev played a laudable part in popularising the issue of salt through *Navajivan* and *Young India*. He wrote three articles under

the heading 'Collection of *Sabras*' Thousands of people who read the *Navajivan* and hundreds of thousands of people who read the papers and periodicals which gave excerpts from that series of articles, must have read those articles. Items of news appeared in the newspapers that Gandhiji was intending to start a Satyagraha on the salt issue Till then Gandhiji had not announced his decision One advantage of this unauthorised declaration by the newspapers was that many people sent a lot of information regarding Salt Laws to Gandhiji He made use of the easily received material Mahadev had studied the material and written the articles on "*Sabras*" And so behind this greatest struggle in the history of India's fight for freedom, what really worked was the essential necessity of millions of people and animals — salt Gandhiji's understanding of the people's minds, Mahadev's knowledge and the capacity of unlimited endurance and devotion to truth of our volunteers and people, were important factors in the struggle.

Before the complete plan of the programme was announced, Gandhiji prepared the people for his arrest through an article, "When I am Arrested" It was natural that as a leader of a non violent struggle he should take care to see that the people maintained peace after he went to jail. But one of his objectives for this non-violent movement was to contain the atmosphere of violence raising its head in the country And so he made it clear in the article that to maintain peace did not mean to do nothing or to feel defeated and keep quiet In the circumstances of his own arrest Gandhiji expected purer and greater sacrifice from the people.

A few days before the Dandi March there was an epidemic of small-pox in the Ashram The disease took a toll of three small, delicate, children in spite of intense and careful nursing Mahadev wrote about this in the *Navajivan* of 9th March 1930 :

"In this incident a number of people were tested in many ways The Ashramites who daily recited the Gita, especially listening to and reciting the verses, 'death is certain for those alive, and birth is certain for those dead', were visited by death thrice in a few days; their recital of Gita was tested as Death snatched away three of their dearest and brilliant children Even Yama, the God of Death, if he could give a certificate would say that the parents of all the three children got through the test with complete success. There were no lamentations Those that had to bury the children went calmly to do so. The rest busied themselves with their work No change occurred in the daily routine of the parents of those three children. One father told the child when death was near, 'My child, recite *Ramnam*' The child repeated *Ramnam* a few times then signalled his inability

to speak. The father of another child handed him over to his mother when his last breaths were on and went as it was the time for evening prayers. When the words, 'What, O Keshav ! is the mark of man whose understanding is secure ?', were being recited, the child died. The father was informed as soon as the prayers were over. Instead of hurrying home from the prayers, the father with a steady mind and a joyful heart conducted a *Ramdhun*. What can be a more blessed sight than this ? When I am writing this I feel that I do not possess that strength of equanimity; I am not ready to welcome Death in that manner; and so I bow to those three sets of parents."⁴

On the other hand Gandhiji's was a test that concerned the principle. Mahadev described it in the same article .

"This was one test. The other one tested the strength of the heart. 'I had cured the disease of many comrades by the treatment of water and mud. I have experimented it on my son too. And not once did I doubt the efficacy of those remedies. And this time my remedies were not useful in the case of the three children ! Was God testing me even in that ? Was it that generally unfailing remedies were also going to fail ? But how could I get frightened like that ? My whole life was spent in experimenting with self, with those who were close to me and also with others. Why should there be fear about something which I have believed to be the truth, even if there seemed to be some harm in experimenting with it ? Those erudite scholars, philosophers and scientists who have tried to discover truth, have given their lives. If I am moved or frightened by only these few deaths, how am I going to give my life ?'

"There was one more struggle within the very same mental turmoil. 'Death is no different from birth, I have always believed life and death to be the two sides of the same coin. If three deaths could frighten me, what was the use of that belief ? What was the point of my faith in God ? My faith in God had no meaning if I suspended the struggle which was due and in which thousands and millions of people may have to be sacrificed. Why should I not believe that probably God was strengthening and hardening my heart by making me a witness to repeated deaths in a few days, perhaps He was preparing me for the struggle that lay ahead, in a better way ?' "⁵

It was at that time that the late Maganlal Gandhi's daughter, Rukshmani, was to be married in the Ashram. Gandhiji conducted the marriage with the same detachment he had maintained during the children's death. Pandit Narayan Moreshwar Khare, whose youngest

son had died of small-pox, officiated as the priest in Rukshmani's marriage with the same steady and detached spirit as Gandhiji.

In the article mentioned above Mahadev had also written about the preparations afoot for the Dandi March :

"We could get a glimpse of what Gandhiji must have been thinking about the future. The women in the Ashram were extremely enthusiastic about joining the struggle since it had been talked about. To measure their enthusiasm, Gandhiji did take down their names. But told them one day, 'I do not want to involve you in the beginning.' The women were disappointed and disheartened. So Gandhiji showed some chivalry. 'About Hindu-Muslim wars of old it is said that the Muslims kept the cow in the front, to put the cow-worshippers Hindus in a dilemma regarding the attack. We are not concerned with whether this story is correct or not. But real warriors cannot do such things. Whatever the English are, we know that they will not hit women. So, it will not behove us, who have talked of facing all sorts of dangers, to keep the women in the fore-front of our brigades. When we are ready to put up with a lot of beating, how could it be that we would keep the ladies in front?'"

"The women understood the situation. But Gandhiji assured them that they would not be kept out of the struggle in future. 'When the men have given all the sacrifice they could, I would not hesitate to send you to jail,' were the words with which he consoled them. They accepted his assurance and decided to put in more work outside jail than by going to jail. The female members got together and shared activities of Khadi, Gaushala, Leather-industry, Children's school and especially Girls' school. Gandhiji encouraged them to share the work, which might train them to take up such responsible work and also because the experience would prepare them for prison duties.

"Gandhiji had taken some of the chief persons who were responsible for these activities in his first-catch. The first sacrifice had to be the best. 'When I thought of the purest sacrifice, I felt that our sacrifice was not the purest but was sullied. But where could I go to search for a better sacrifice? And so I have selected all those worth the selection from those being trained in the Ashram.'"⁶

Durga was also one of the Ashram women.¹ She was also keen to plunge into the struggle as the other women. She had gone to Gandhiji as a part of a delegation of Ashram women to ask why he was not taking them on the march.¹ Apart from the argument quoted

above as given by Mahadev, Gandhiji extended one more argument. He had explained to the women that to go on the Dandi March was very easy. He expected greater daring and valour from the women. And so he would entrust work of greater boldness to them at the proper time. This argument appealed to Durga as it did to the other women. And in fact within a couple of months the valour of these women was amply tested. The incident which is being described actually occurred some time later, but we will mention it here. In the course of Dharasana Satyagraha, Narahari was mercilessly beaten and he fell down unconscious. His daughter, Vanmala, has described in very restrained language, the test Maniben Parikh went through when she was picketing a liquor den in Sabarmati :

"Hardly ten or twelve days had passed since coming to the place of picketing when men coming from the city started bringing in the news about several arrests at Dharasana after excessive lathi charges. Correct, authoritative news from that small railway yard in the interior was not available at all. Maniben told those men to go to the Congress House and get news about Narahari. One of them brought an unsupported piece of news that Narahari had died. Somebody had seen him unconscious and reported that he had died.

"One has only to imagine the condition of Maniben's mind. But she was firm and of a fixed resolve and she did not leave the liquor-den. Instead she suffered mental torture. Then she sent a message to the Ashram to make inquiries about Narahari and to let her have the correct information. Vanmala went to meet her mother (from the Ashram) saying that she would return with the gentleman who was to bring the message. Maniben must have been very upset and in need of her daughter's support, so she kept Vanmala with herself.

"After three or four days, news was brought from Dharasana that Narahari was brutally beaten, was just saved from death and that he was arrested and taken to Nasik Jail. Durga herself went to Maniben with this message. Maniben described to her friend the terrible torture she had suffered for these five or six days. They had taken their toll, however, and she broke down and wept."

During this struggle Gandhiji had formulated the strategy like a skilful commander. He had selected only the Ashramites to join the group of Satyagrahis. But he had planned and kept some men out of the March. At that time the greater part of the Sabarmati Ashram had been named 'Industrial School'. He held Mahadev back with the intention that he would guide the non-violent struggle in case

Gandhiji was arrested early and Imam Saheb was to look after all the children in the Ashram.

Mahadev had already begun the work intended for him. He contributed to Gandhiji's correspondence with outsiders along with his articles in *Navajivan* and *Young India*. His pen had played an important role in portraying Vallabhbhai's arrest as the fore-runner of an oncoming struggle.

Mahadev went with Acharya Kripalani to the Sabarmati Jail and interviewed the Sardar. The report of the interviews was such that it poured strength in the hearts of the (non-violent) soldiers. The first two sentences indicate how it was expected of the Satyagrahis to regard prison as a holy place. "The same loud laugh, the same sarcasm and the same jovial nature ! It was difficult to realise that the Sardar was in jail !"

It is not necessary to quote the whole interview, but we will cite an extract from that thrilling audience to experience the magic of Mahadev's pen :

"In an answer to a question about how he was being treated, he said, 'I am treated as they treat the criminals. But it is a lot of fun. I was never so happy in my life before. . . The food needs no description ! We have not come to jail to enjoy ! Somewhat thick *rotlas* and *dal* one day and *rotla* and vegetable the next day. It is fit enough to be consumed by horses ! 'But is it fit for human consumption ?' 'Why not ? Formerly I was not regular with my bowels; here, I regularly go once a day. What more can be needed ? Why are you worried about it ? For the three months I can live on air !' And he laughed uproariously which almost shook the prison-gates."

Scores of reporters started coming to the Sabarmati Ashram and its prayer-ground to try to understand Gandhiji's strategy. Mahadev gave Gandhiji's talks with the reporters in the form of a dialogue in the *Navajivan*. It was characteristic of Mahadev to present the interviews forcefully in the form of dialogues.

In the issue of *Navajivan* of 16th March 1930, Mahadev introduced those selected by Gandhiji for the Dandi March. Among about forty national and international reporters, no one had given such detailed information about the Satyagrahis as Mahadev did.

Mahadev had compared Gandhiji leaving the Sabarmati Ashram for Dandi with the Great Renunciation of the Buddha. That description is so vivid that a considerable part of Mahadev's article "Great Renunciation" in the *Navajivan* of the 16th March 1930 is given here :

"Many would have seen in the newspapers the sight of Gandhiji and his companions leaving the Ashram on the

auspicious day of the 12th March, some would have seen it in person, and still it seems that something had been left unsaid. Hundreds of people have written commentary on the Gita, but have they stopped others from doing so ?

"Last week there were crowds on the prayer ground of the Ashram. On the 10th night Gandhiji saw two thousand people collected there. Some wanted to take his last *darshan* before his arrest, some wanted to hear his last words, for some the sight of the party led by a tiny man against a powerful Empire was itself miraculous, every one knew that the Government was going to be challenged. They were not worried that their presence in the Ashram would dub them as sympathisers of the struggle, not that they were there as traitors to the Empire. But to me there was no exaggeration in stating that all of them were rebels and patriots.

"But in that crowd there were Government servants, mill owners, labourers — families of three mill owners undertook a night long vigil, families of four mill-owners had come to bless Gandhiji and the textile workers spent the whole night singing *bhajans* and shouting *Gandhiji-ji*. There were common observers and special observers like Sir Prabhashankar Pattani. No body could say that all these had gathered to perpetuate the Government, but who would doubt as to the fact that they had gathered to sympathise and bless the effort of the good work undertaken by Gandhiji to get rid of the Empire by extraordinary means ?

"No doubt, one thing was definite. As Gandhiji declared, no one had any hatred in their eyes, as Gandhiji had none. There was no bitterness whatsoever in this great journey and all had gathered to witness and experience the emotion of the capacity to get rid of slavery without enmity or bitterness.

"No body had made proclamations to call these people, no appeals had been sent out to come to the March. And yet all came — young and old of all communities and castes, sat down eagerly, spread over the area for miles and miles together, to witness this historic journey; as the marchers passed, money, grains of rice, *kumkum* and flowers were showered on them. It was indeed goodwill all round.

"There were curious people as well, there were reporters and photographers taking photos from their cars; — they generally went with the same curiosity to a place where there was a fire or a deluge; and they would take pictures with the same curiosity even if the Government resorted to firing. There were journalists who wanted to degrade the movement, unable

to bear the novel awakening; there were a few foreigners wondering curiously, 'What mischief is this Gandhi upto?' — and there were journalists from abroad with a balanced outlook, who had come to study this unprecedented struggle. But no one had enmity towards the foreigners or even for the journalists who were critical, the Government had not sent any army or police force so there was no question of hatred for that

"An obvious serenity prevailed in the mammoth gathering. The eyes of women from rich and well known families became moist at bidding farewell to Gandhiji; there were devotees who considered themselves and their families blessed when they beheld an ideal man of God, as had been described in the famous song "*Vaishnava Jana*", starting on a historic journey. There were Muslim friends who loved that serious face of Gandhiji, there were many women with moist eyes who were reminded of Lord Rama going towards Panchavati after leaving Ayodhya. And there were Maharashtrian women who were reminded of Shivaji's horse when they saw the excellent canter of the horse given by Sir Chinubhai.

"Many pictures of that time keep on appearing off and on before the mind's eyes. The picture of that ideal '*Vaishnava*' brings before me the Buddha's Great Renunciation rather than Rama going to win over Lanka or the victorious Shivaji 'I am coming, oh people of the Universe, submerged in misery' It would not be surprising if Gandhiji had the same sentiments in his mind as those of the Buddha, bidding farewell to the world and moving on, piercing the darkness of the night. Lord Buddha had maintained silence, Gandhiji made the world the witness of his mental agony, that was the only difference between the two scenes. But those who understood the seriousness of how Gandhiji began after taking a pledge, made his co-workers take the same pledge and kept on warning his soldiers till the last day and the last minute; would they not call this journey the Great Renunciation?

"Those who were shouldering the great responsibility had only one type of wealth. The Ashramites had only one capital. We could not show a stock of knowledge. We had only one type of wealth — maintaining our restraints and regulations or tremendous efforts to do so. The vows which were responsible for establishing the Ashram were our invaluable riches. We had to maintain those vows. If there was any doubt about the vows, that could be removed even at the last moment. . . .

"This was the last decision. It was not a drama. When Vallabhbhai was arrested, Pandit Khare sang, 'Let us serve the

Lord at the cost of our head.' This struggle is going to cost heads; it is possible that riots may occur, we have not to escape and run away even if there is violence and blood-shed. If we run away we will not get freedom. If there are riots — we can die — at the hands of Hindus, Muslims. And even by dying in riots we would get the chance to prove the purpose of non-violence. . . .

"Remember this is life's asceticism . . . this is a great struggle for principles. We are conducting a sacrifice with wide ramifications, and we have to plunge into it as offerings. If you are weak, remove yourself. Your weakness is not your shame but it is mine, because the strength that God has given me is in all of you. Soul is one. . .

"If this is not this era's Great Renunciation, then what else is it? I know of those who believe it to be exactly that. They are ready to believe it to be a unique, unprecedented experiment in non-violence and yet there is a doubt, 'Can it not be a jump in the dark?' But the poet has described even Lord Buddha as 'Going in the dark night, he is going on and on'. For us that is the dark night. For those thousands of spectators it is likely to be a dark night. Gandhiji is the light which illuminates the night, he is the constant manifestation of the flame of Truth and Non-violence and so he is certainly not the night. The struggle will extend till our night ends. Gandhiji is indifferent whether the struggle is long or short. . . ."¹⁰

The correspondence between Mahadev and Mohan began on the first day of the Great Renunciation. One took care of *Navajivan*, arranged gigantic meetings daily to spread Gandhiji's message, looked after the Ashram. The other one at the age of sixty-one, marched for an average of eighteen to twenty miles a day with a speed and freshness which would put young men to shame, addressed crowds of thousands more than once a day; put up with the onslaught of the reporters; arranged discussions with the leaders, and kept ever vigilant about the character of the seventy-eight soldiers of the brigade and kept the brigade on its toes, in perfect shape.

In the midst of all this the correspondence went on. Many of the letters written by Mahadev are lost. But we can understand their contents by reading Gandhiji's

Mahadev must have written a letter on the 12th, because the answer of the 13th is as follows :

"*Chi*. Mahadev,

I did get your letter. God will grant you everything. We may take it the Ashram has done well so far. But there is scope

for much further awakening still. Let us not feel elated too soon. If I remain free, you should certainly take the plunge. I want an account of the good or the harm which the fast may have done Durga.

Blessings from Bapu.

P.S. I had intended to write a separate letter to her, but have dropped the idea."¹¹

And on the 15th Mahadev 'dived in' according to his master's orders.

The following is the beginning of an article, 'Ten Minutes with Gandhiji', in *Navajivan* of 23rd March 1930 :

"The day on which Kakasaheb and I boarded the train at Ahmedabad for Nadiad, it was very crowded. Everyone was talking about Gandhiji's march. Two or three thousand people, not satisfied with seeing him at Ahmedabad were going to Nadiad. We had to go for our work.

"Nobody needed to ask whilst getting down at Nadiad as to where Gandhiji had put up. All people were turning to the road leading to Santram Temple. Any newcomer mingled with that unending line. There was such a huge gathering outside the walls of the temple that it was impossible to see Gandhiji without knowing the local workers. Fortunately Fulchandbhai saw us from a distance and he took us to the balcony where Gandhiji had been put up, through a private road. Even in that private road, there were about a thousand people. The crowd in the balcony was so large that it was near suffocation. Gandhiji was sitting in the midst of this group and taking his evening meal. Whilst he was eating, important talks were going on along with his feet being massaged. Our one thought was 'why do people not allow him to eat without disturbing him?' But then just as we went to him for advice for our work, others also might have come for the same reason! How was it possible then that he ate undisturbed, when he had not done so for the last twelve years?"¹²

A reply had to be given to Jawaharlal's telegram regarding the venue of the next Congress Session; a selection had to be made between Anand and Borjavi as a place for the entire group to dine, and yet with Mahadev he talked about the decision of his inner voice.

"He turned to me and said, 'Till today God has taken care of things, in spite of a number of difficulties. These people had only guessed the distances from one village to another, and so we have had to walk for fifteen miles instead of ten. I have been persuaded to use a bullock-cart or a horse, but my

decision is like that of the pilgrims to Amarnath or Badrikedar, and that is to sit down if tired but to walk the whole distance. Isn't ours is a pilgrimage too !"¹³

Next morning Gandhiji was dealing with the post; he got up an hour earlier than his companions to deal with the post. Mahadev noticed that the oil in the lamp was finished. Not wanting to wake up the tired volunteer, he was writing in the moonlight.

Mahadev asked, 'How can you write in this light?' He said, 'Writing is easy; reading is difficult.' There was an insistence on maintaining the Ashram routine in the soldier's time-table. And so in this 'moving Ashram' prayers twice, spinning as an act of sacrifice and writing the diary at the end of the day were being adhered to. The members of the brigade had been given different responsibilities along with the Ashram routine. The last paragraph of the description of the Nadiad visit revealed Mahadev's attitude :

"This is our pilgrimage, and not a single minute, therefore, should be wasted. It is important in our pilgrimage. We cannot do a single thing by which we may feel ashamed and every minute should be utilised in self-purification and self-examination.

"From this precision of keeping account of every moment, made it possible to understand the seriousness of the pledge of not sitting quietly, nor allowing the Government to sit quietly till freedom was won. It was hoped that Gandhiji would get more peace and rest once he left the Ashram. But without freedom, within or outside the Ashram, within or outside the jail, the hope of peace was of no avail."¹⁴

Three different companies made films of the Dandi March. The Government of Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab banned these films. Mahadev, criticising this step, wrote in *Young India* of 27th March 1930 :

"It will be remembered that the Bombay Board of Film Censors had certified them as unobjectionable, but the Governments of Bombay, the U.P. and the Punjab had obviously, reasons which were beyond the ken of the Board of Censors. If these films were so much explosive stuff, one wonders why the actual march which must be a hundred times more explosive should be allowed to continue from day to day. But it is no use trying to dissect the strategy of the Government. It may be foolish, it may be deceptive, it may be anything, the only strategy of the Satyagrahi is truthful and non-violent action in broad daylight. It may however be necessary to tell everyone concerned that India's battle for freedom does not depend in the least on cinema films. The

struggle which was auspiciously begun on the 6th of April 1919, and which 'puzzled and preplexed' Lords Reading and Lloyd, did not depend on cinema films and had not to be interrupted for want of cinema films."¹⁵

Mahadev reminded the people that though there were no cinemas in ancient times during the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and in the modern times during the French and the American Revolutions, people did have patriotism. The French and American people still remember their Revolution days and no one can erase 13th April 1919 from the memory of the Indian people.

During the Dandi March days the Government denied that there had been any resignations, when there were a number of them from the Patels and Talatis. Then it said that the number was very small and ventured so far as to add that they resigned under duress and were keen to take back their resignations.

In an article in *Navajivan* of 6th April 1930, Mahadev exposed this lie by giving specific instances of a number of resignations of Government servants as he was responsible for getting them in the Surat district. In this article Mahadev used two words to describe Gandhiji's campaign which are generally used for Lord Rama.

Before the Dandi March began the Sardar had described the approaching struggle as a 'righteous struggle' in a meeting at Baroda. Some English newspapers reported it and translated the word as 'religious war'. Mahadev clarified the point in an article titled "Righteous Struggle" in the *Navajivan* of 6th April 1930.

"In this (struggle) Hindus are not going to challenge people of other religions with the call 'Har Har Mahadev', or the Muslims . . . with a call 'Deen Deen'. On the contrary Hindus, Parsis, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Indians and the English are going to participate. So this struggle is neither a 'jihad' nor a war for religious causes."

He further clarified the importance of the word righteous struggle thus :

"The aim and the means for this struggle are religious. Those who do not have faith in truth and non-violence cannot participate in this struggle. Complete independence for this country means the independence for its millions of poor people . . . Thus from the point of view of both aim and the means this struggle is distinct from any other struggle of yore. If this unique quality of this struggle is understood, it would not be difficult to understand why Gandhiji calls this March a pilgrimage, why he is ever awake regarding the thoughts, speech and deeds of his soldiers and why he expresses repeatedly his powerful emotions."¹⁶

Mahadev ended by saying . "We would have more and more evidence of greater self-purification, self-restraint and self-examination, as the righteous struggle gets on the way."¹⁷

The awakening in Gujarat and in the rest of the country increased with the advance of the March started by Gandhiji on the 12th March from the Sabarmati Ashram Ahmedabad maintained the spirit for a long time thereafter. Mahadev's work was to co-ordinate activities in Gujarat from Ahmedabad and to move out to nearby places. Daily demands started pouring in for him to address meetings as the main speaker. Parks and open fields in Ahmedabad city became inadequate for public meetings and so gigantic meetings were held on the banks of the Sabarmati rivers. There were no loudspeakers in those days. So Mahadev would stand on a table and speak and others would stand at a distance and repeat Mahadev's words. Once or twice the meetings were so huge that the people stood at a distance of a few miles on the Ellisbridge and heard the speech. The whole sight became a sea of white caps. The speeches at such large gatherings were brief and very often these gatherings were organised for the purpose of auctioning illegal salt.

When groups of Satyagrahis were sent to the place of duty smaller meetings were convened during which the speakers dealt with the subject in depth. It was at such meetings that Mahadev explained the essence of this righteous struggle in various ways. In the public meetings only the procedure of Satyagraha was explained. From the 6th of April 1930 when Gandhiji lifted illegal salt at Dandi, programmes of lifting illegal salt started in the whole country. Mahadev said in one meeting at Ahmedabad -

"Today, wherever possible, people would start to become 'true to one's salt' in the whole country . . . He (Gandhiji) says that we have been faithless (*namakharam*) towards the poor people of India and hence faithless towards India. So let us become 'true to our salt' by abolishing the Salt Law. According to the demonic law, to collect natural salt, to separate salt from dust, to prepare salt from sea water by boiling it or heating it through sun-rays, is a crime. To sell that salt is a crime, to bring salt from a foreign frontier into the British boundary without customs duty is a crime. Gujarat has prepared to commit all these offences. The provincial committee has distributed natural salt of Dholera and Dandi to volunteers. Khurshedben, Dadabhai Naoroji's granddaughter and Mridula, Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai's daughter, have become volunteers to sell this salt. We do not have a big amount of salt, so every volunteer has been given one ounce packets. Those men and women will go into Ahmedabad city to sell that salt shouting

'Swaraj *sabras*'. . . . Those who have come to bless the soldiers, please fill their pockets. The value of one ounce is nothing . . . but the value of breaking the demonic law by selling one ounce salt cannot be measured. . . . The buyer also should know that even to purchase that salt is an offence. We will abolish the Salt-Law by thousands of us committing that offence. The sale proceeds of the salt will go to the funds of the Satyagraha struggle . . . The only condition for winning in this struggle is non-violence. Go ahead with keeping that in view like the Pole Star. Except *namakhalal* and *namakharam* we do not have a third party."¹⁸

The soldiers with Gandhiji started to subsist on *chana-mamra* (puffed rice and gram) during the march which prompted the volunteers at Ahmedabad, Dholera and other places to do the same and live like the poor people of the nation.

Mahadev enthused the listeners by giving the news of the progress of the Satyagraha in his daily speeches.

Gandhiji congratulated Gujarat through a letter written to Mahadev from Dandi on the 7th April. Many questions such as whether salt should be sold in the public meetings or not, and what type of work should be allotted to women, were discussed through letters from the Commander to the Captain of the army. A meeting of Ahmedabad students was convened under the sponsorship of Gujarat College Students Group and Young Men's Group on 8th April 1930. As the President of the meeting, Mahadev imparted advice to the students and presented the whole programme to them :

"You have got many tasks ahead such as to stop quarrels, prohibition, get the slave-dens of the Government to close down and spread the message of the movement in the villages. The victory of Bardoli was on account of wide-spread work in the villages by the Gujarat Vidyapith students. Next year there is going to be severe struggle regarding land revenue when the present work in the villages will be useful. Gujarat has become so alert that other provinces would be astonished when perhaps Gujarat alone will bring in freedom. I have yet to call Kripalani and get the Gujarat College to close down."¹⁹

Having heard about police activities in Dholera, Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev :

" . . . On the Dholera side the authorities seem to be acting in a novel fashion. I think you should pay a visit to that part. From today I have started visiting the neighbouring villages. I don't intend this week to go outside the limits of this Taluka or its neighbourhood. If, however, it becomes necessary I will be ready to go to Dholera or any place near it."²⁰

In a meeting on the 9th April, Mahadev spoke in the language of an army's captain :

"Now we are getting salt from many places. I shall inform the police about it. A heap of salt is to be collected on the 13th. I intend to bring it out in heaps. If volunteers are badly beaten, I shall get the women to do it and would like to see who touches them ! On the 13th we want to make a huge bonfire of foreign cloth. Volunteers will collect foreign clothes. So be ready to give as many as possible. Any citizen who wants to give any kind of help to the movement should give it to the provincial committee."²¹

Again :

"The movement is progressing. We do not know what all is going on just now when we have collected together. . . . Those who want rigorous imprisonment should go to Bandra and Bombay. Those who want simple imprisonment should go to Viramgam ! Another field is at Surat and Bharuch. Those who want to remain free should stand and give a speech. Yesterday I had congratulated the Ahmedabad police but they don't seem to deserve it. They are also doing the same as the Dholera police - acting like animals. The man who was tortured is here today. His thumb is swollen. This is the opportunity to witness the bestiality the police are capable of. . . ."²²

Mahadev reached Dholera on the 10th according to Gandhiji's wishes. He (Mahadev) wrote from there :

"I have just returned from a place where salt is lifted publicly. I felt that I would be arrested but so far I am free. The crowds were so large that the police did not succeed in reaching the place where we were. Of course, they could do so later on. I am sending a sample of our tax-free salt with this. I hope you will like it."

Mahadev."²³

The above-mentioned letter had been written in English. It was perhaps sent to the Congress President, Jawaharlal and a copy of it was sent to Gandhiji. Mahadev raised a question in a public lecture on the 10th :

"Where did the salt-law disappear when the Government arrested leaders for sedition, instigation and unlawful assembly ? Very few have been arrested for that. But this is a Government's trick. Just as the Government is powerful in some ways, it is also quite powerful in spreading lies. It is quite likely that it had been reported in England that Gandhiji made salt in a ditch and the law is being broken at some places.

Ramsay MacDonald had described the Salt Law as unjust in a book written by him ten years ago. Under these circumstances the Government would be censured if they arrest Gandhiji. Even in other arrests, by applying sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Government wanted to spread a lie that the Salt Law was not broken at many places."

He said further :

"Dholera is a hundred miles away from here; there is a boundary in between. The police stopped our car whilst coming from there. Whilst I asked an officer, 'Why are you becoming a monster by doing this job ? Tomorrow you will fire at us !' He replied, 'God will not allow me to fire, though I will try. We want that this Government should be destroyed. But where is the strength in you all to do so ?' "

He said further :

"I have myself seen what happened in Dholera. Amritlal Sheth has about a hundred to hundred and fifty volunteers. They are to be congratulated. They go to a distance of four miles to collect salt. Four officers and other constables compete with them. It cannot even be called a competition; because five-six constables attack a boy of fifteen or seventeen years and still the struggle goes on for five to seven minutes. The constables crush his fingers till they bleed, then he is thrown down and the salt snatched from him. Another Satyagrahi who was fifty years old, Nagindas Modi by name, gave them a lot of trouble."²⁴

There is a daily correspondence between Gandhiji and Mahadev. Someone raised a doubt, 'Can such lifting of salt not be called smuggling ?' Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev on 11th April

"If people do not hide a thing there is no smuggling. There is 'smuggling' only when there is an intention to hide. What you are doing, therefore, is all right. The person carrying the salt should declare (at the end) from where he brought it. Is it not permissible to get salt by post ?"²⁵

In the same letter he wrote : "Take rest from time to time. Entrust to others what they can do."²⁵

When the movement became national, Mahadev began giving weekly news of the entire scenario to the people of Gujarat through *Navajivan*. Some parts of the article "First Week" are given below to review some history and Mahadev's temperament at the time

"The awakening in the country seems to be far more than what Gandhiji expected when he began the Great Renunciation March on the 12th March

"In Gujarat the movement started on the 6th itself. And in the four districts of Surat, Bharuch, Kheda and Ahmedabad arrangements for Satyagraha were made at as many places as possible. In the history of the 1930 movement, the struggles in Dandi, Aat, Badalpur, Lasundra, Dholera and Viramgam would have a pride of place. Thousands of packets of Swaraj *Sabras* were sold in Surat and Ahmedabad; enthusiastic volunteers sold them in courts, near the police stations, embarrassed the police officers by offering to sell the packets to them. The buyers not only declared their names but challenged the police, 'Arrest us if you can.' A number of villages around Dandi participated — including men, women and children and to-day every house in villages like Aat, Bhimrad, has stored the 'stolen salt' that will last them for an year. The organisation against the Salt Tax in Lasundra became so strong that it was difficult for the police to live there, and so people became free to do what they wanted. How many could they stop or arrest? Policemen have also run away after being fed up and no sign remains of the Salt Law. . . .

"The awakening of the people is indescribable. Every evening thousands of people get together in the sands of Ahmedabad. They do not get any new message, there are no speeches and yet people keep on coming. Women do not get tired even of sitting till 8 o'clock at night. Traders are ready to help in a number of ways. Women ask permission to go round and sell salt, they are preparing to take a pledge of Swadeshi. Heaps of foreign clothes have been dumped in the provincial committee premises. People pay handsomely for the salt. On the 10th which was the fifth day of the sale of salt, the income from the salt was about Rs. 3,600/- Chimanlal Broker gave up his legal practice. He is ready to work at whatever Gandhiji wants him to. Vamanrao Mukadam resigned as an M.L.C. and has joined as a soldier. When Swaminarayan went to Dholera and saw what was happening there, he also went to offer Satyagraha. He sold salt in a public meeting, and on the 13th he is going to sell salt openly. Ranchhodbhai amongst the millowners played a thrilling part. . . . There are sons of renowned families of Ahmedabad, there are sons of Government servants, there are pensioners (who were arrested in the group at Dholka), there are women, Muslims, a number of labourers. Real awakening of the people is never narrow and limited, it is widespread.

"It is difficult to say whose share is greater in the first offering — that of the Khadi workers, or of the Rashtriya

Vidyapith, or of those engaged in all national activities . . . The Government may get any statements from Shaukat-Mohammed by flattering them,²⁶ they have not succeeded in preventing brave young men like Meherally and Abidali from going to jail. I do not know whether the Parsi community would be feeling proud or not by sending Behram Mehta, the untiring worker of prohibition, to jail, but Mithuben indeed must be envying him . . .

"Till today the phrase 'an illegal gang' was used for groups of mischief mongers or *goondas*. Today it is applied to the peaceful, organised groups of Satyagrahis. Fulchand Shah was arrested for being a member of such a group and for singing revolutionary songs. One of the songs was :

'Loosen the sinews of the Government.' "

When Fulchandbhai was being tried thousand of people outside the court were singing the same song, loudly enough to disturb the Magistrate and laughing at British justice. . . .

"Now let me give some facts about Dholera. The freedom-fighters selected by Amritlal Sheth are glorifying both Kathiawad and Amritlal Sheth. They walk four miles from Dholera to get the salt. They are arrested whilst bringing the salt. They are attacked in the presence of two British officers, one Muslim officer and one Hindu officer. Five or six strong policemen attack them. The Kathiawadi freedom-fighter, whether he is seventeen years old or fifty-seven years old, resists the attack for a few minutes. During the resistance, those people bite him, scratch him, do not care if blood oozes from the fingers. A British officer named Fletcher told me, 'Your soldiers are behaving splendidly.' I said, 'That is correct, but it is sad that there is no effect of that good behaviour on you. It is a shameful thing that your policemen become brutes.' He said, 'This is like a foot-ball game. Don't you get scratches in a game?' Some time later the same 'foot ball game' was on and I showed him the bleeding finger of one soldier when he said, 'It is unfortunate. I am sorry. But I use more men so that the least amount of strength has to be used. . . .'

"Thus on one side our soldiers are displaying their courage without speaking, without using abusive language and without lifting a finger. While our own 'soldiers' who have doubly betrayed us in the Government service, bite these people and bleed them. I talked to the policemen. I called those who attacked cowards, but it had no effect. But some others who were standing a bit farther away felt embarrassed. They said, 'What can we do? We have to do this to fill our bellies!' I

said, 'You have even to become dogs?' They said, 'The law is like that what can be done?'. . . On returning the policeman on the boundary line also said the same thing. He signed and said, 'We are working with a hope of a pension. Gandhiji is doing service to the people, but it is unfortunate that this Government does not end. If we can be sure of its end, we will immediately leave it.' He was a Muslim. He further said, 'My uncle, Shaukat-Mohammad in Delhi, had given hope for freedom. But in 1921 we could not get it. How can we hope for it this year too?' I said, 'All right! Leave this Government when you hope to be free. But do not become a brute. Do not be censured and never fire on your brother.' He was touched and said, 'I might feel like firing but God will not allow it. . . .'

"Those who practise this brutality are also our brothers. It is everyone's duty to befriend the police wherever you meet them and try to make them see reason; but the greater duty is to convince them by our behaviour that freedom is within their sight. . . ."

"The world has seen how widely, non-violent civil disobedience can be practised and Lord Irwin must already be asking his sagacious advisers, 'Thousands of people are participating in this civil disobedience, why are there no riots or oppression in spite of the brutality of the police? The definition of civil disobedience which you gave me seems to be wrong.' But this is only the first phase of self-sacrifice and tolerating suffering. Firing is yet to come. Lord Irwin will then be fully convinced."²⁷

Gandhiji remained free for more days than he had anticipated. He wrote to Mahadev on the night of the 6th April:

"I hear that Manilal Kothari has been arrested. Ramdas and others have already been arrested. All this is very good. For you also it is a matter of days or hours. As for me, it will make no difference whether I am inside or outside jail. . . . If you get time, organise the women. There will be no harm if the Ashram women make a start. On the contrary it may be necessary that they do so. I am referring to the campaign against drinking. . . . Here they have not laid hands on anyone so far. Sarojini Devi has remained here and has decided to take Abbas's place if the old man is arrested."²⁸

On the 14th April he wrote:

"I wrote to you one letter in the morning. This is the second. It is 10.30 p.m. Jawahar has also been arrested. Pandya, Ghia and others have been arrested here. It is rumoured that they also intend to arrest Jugatram. All these persons certainly

needed rest. They had been working ceaselessly. People seem to have learnt now to work on their own. Bring Ba fully prepared. She should bring with her whatever things she may want, I have found some work for her."²⁹

In one lecture Mahadev said :

"After I came from Dholera and described the movement there in that day's meeting, the local police officers met me and told me, 'We have sent orders to behave better and not be oppressive.' But the latest news from Dholera are terrifying. This Government was never defamed as it has been now because of the torture inflicted upon Ambalal Shukla. Eight to ten policemen jumped on Ambalal, he was beaten in the chest with fists, his throat was scratched and lastly his private parts were also squeezed. There cannot be worse torture. When he became conscious after one and half hours, at the hospital where the volunteers took him, he asked, 'I am not in the Government hospital, am I?' And he said further, 'I still have the salt.' His courage will be lauded everywhere in Gujarat. The destruction of this government is definite on account of the non-violence still present in him."³⁰

On the 15th Gandhiji heard a rumour that Mahadev was arrested. He immediately wrote :

"*Chi*. Mahadev,

I have just heard that you are arrested. So be it. You will get some rest. The wonder is that they left you free even as long as they did. The more the people are tested, the better.

'For this once, O Girdhari, save Thou my honour.'

Blessings from Bapu."³¹

News of disturbances in Karachi, Calcutta and Poona, trickled in. Mahadev spoke about it in a meeting at Ahmedabad :

"This is a battle between the Gods and the devils. (This is an episode of Indian mythology.) The Government is positively devilish; but we have also to fight the demon within us. It was the police who irritated the people in Karachi. It was the police who irritated, excited the people and instigated them in Calcutta. But the people in Calcutta, that started riots, hurt other people and burnt the trams, were our own people. And since we have joined this sacred struggle on the sixth, we are pledged not to harm Indians or Europeans. And so such incidents should make us feel ashamed and sorry. Gandhiji had suggested that a way should be found by which all the volunteers for peace should sacrifice through the very violence which might have broke out. They shouldn't wait and watch. That is the only brake that can be applied to violence even when the struggle is

in full swing Jai Ramdas is facing that test. Sengupta and Subhas, both were in jail during Calcutta riots. By imprisoning leaders of the people the Government is doubly responsible for maintaining peace. And so only the Government is responsible for the riots. The volunteers from Gujarat have all done well."³²

Some important points from the article titled "Second Week" in *Navajivan* of 20th April 1930 are given below :

"The sacrifices of Gujarat have progressively increased. The Government is arresting volunteers picking them up from every place in Gujarat. The Government's efforts to create disturbances by arresting volunteers for peace have been in vain here. Nowhere else has Salt Law been flouted as it was in Gujarat. Today Ramniklal Chunilal, a young man from the Ahmedabad group was bitten and scratched in the armpit to snatch away the salt, the police crushed his hands and feet with shoe heels, gagged him, tried to strangle him and he fainted at last when his private parts were squeezed. Ramniklal was brought to the camp on a stretcher, and regained consciousness when water was sprinkled on him. At present hot fomentation is in progress. His whole body has swollen up and is paining. His courage can be compared with any brave *kshatriya* warrior. The head constable realised at eleven o'clock at night that he should inquire after Ramniklal's health and he came to the camp, but at that time the wounded man had become drowsy with sleep."³³

Gandhiji sent a special message to the soldiers for freedom at Dholera and Viramgam. He asked the volunteer who had sent the news to be careful and to be ready to prove his statement. He also wrote that more severe forms of Satyagraha than the present ones, would be adopted later on :

"Those on whom these indignities have been inflicted should not be afraid. I am eager to go to that area. And if these atrocities do not cease, God willing, I shall go and suggest ways of preventing them. I assure them that although I am trying to cope with the work in Surat district, my mind is occupied with the Dholera and Viramgam events."³⁴

Devdas Gandhi was arrested at Delhi. In a letter beginning with, 'Oh ! Here we have entered the jail', he gave an exact yet humorous description of the Delhi movement and the jail on 12th April 1930.

On the 20th April Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev :

"I have had no letter from you for two days. I am eager to know what is happening in Viramgam and Dholera. Either write to me yourself, or ask someone else to write. There seems

to have been an actual revolt in Chittagong May everything be as Rama wills."³⁵

Mahadev was arrested on 23rd April. He had described his arrest and his state of mind thereafter in a very effective style. We will give a major part of it here :

"Twice there was a rumour about my arrest and twice it was false. On the first occasion it was so widespread that I read my obituary in many papers during my life. But this time I have really been arrested. So this time the fear of the wolf has been real but it would be better to say that I went to the wolf instead of its coming to me, and that is my only regret. I have not left a single opportunity of preaching sedition. In the last seventeen days I broke the Salt Law in as many ways as I could being in Ahmedabad. I instigated thousands to break that law. And still I was not arrested. I was not sorry for that because every moment I was busy. At the end it was only through a mischievous trick that my comrade and I were arrested. The police officers who stopped our truck full of sacks of salt repeatedly requested me, 'You do not need to get arrested, you were in another car, why are you getting in this lorry ?' But my concept of duty was a bit different from that of those decent police officers. 'It was intolerable to me to remain away from the lorry in which the young men had brought the sacks on my orders and so you would not get the sacks till you arrest all of us.' That officer did not have the authority to arrest, so we were taken to the Gaekwadnī Haveli alongwith the lorry. The Police Superintendent, Collector and others conferred for about two hours, and the Irish Police Superintendent who understood the meaning of self respect came out and said, 'If you do not surrender the salt, we have no other alternative but to arrest you.' I am thankful to that police officer for arresting us all instead of using brutal methods. . . . He smiled and said, 'I did not believe that you would be arrested in this way. I thought you must be at Viramgam.' These words expressed his goodness as well as a soft reproach to me. The awareness of that reproach is bothering me when I am writing this. It is possible that in this very month the struggle will take a very serious turn. . . . I am not very happy to be arrested when in a short time the country is going to witness an enormous sacrifice with unparalleled offerings. I was arrested when I was dreaming to be with Gandhiji along with selected friends when he would be with us soldiers buried under a volley of firing. But to give that great offering austerity of many lives and extreme self-purification would be required. . . .

"On thinking about this I remembered Pritamdas's words about the pearl collectors diving for pearls :

'Those inside are supremely happy,

Those watching are envious.'

"There is no 'supreme happiness' today in going to jail, because jail contains no longer the purifying flames. The purifying flames are burning outside. The people in jail are the observers, enjoying themselves. Those people working outside the prison, preparing to burn themselves out in the purifying flames are really those 'inside', and now I do not have the chance of that 'supreme happiness', and I am hurt that I have only to see and suffer in jail. . . "36

The Magistrate sentenced Mahadev to six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 250 and a month and a half more if the fine was not paid.

Gandhi wrote in a letter on 25th April 1930 to Mahadev with reference to his anguish at being arrested because of a 'mischievous trick' and that he would not be able to be with those ready to sacrifice themselves :

"Of course you have my blessings. Though I see that you had no choice but to get on the lorry, in my view you did commit an error. I am pointing it out in fact for the benefit of others, but let my criticism be for your benefit too. There was no need to forfeit the vehicle. I had thought that you would devise a method of carrying the salt by stages as they used to do in carrying Ganga water, and had very much liked the idea. Suppose that we have a camp of twenty-five men at every five miles or so. A batch of twenty five, each man starting with five seers, would mean three maunds and five seers. The first batch would hand over the stock at the second camp and stay there. The second batch would deliver the stock at the third camp and return to its camp, after which the first batch would proceed to Dholera. This would have provided very good training and it would have been easy to protect the salt. There was nothing to lose in this arrangement. The method which you followed involved the possibility of losing the cart and the certainty of losing the lorry. Moreover, it required your hiding something, and the success of your plan depended upon your ability to do so. We should, of course, have nothing to hide. Any method in which we have to hide something requires the cunning needed in the ordinary kind of war, which we ought not to practise. Moreover, for taking possession of the salt carried in a lorry the police would be required to use much greater force. We should not needlessly compel them to do so. Hence, though your plan

certainly required much courage and no less intelligence, it was not based on perfect non-violence. But in the prevailing atmosphere, I do not think you would have realised this by yourself. Who knows where I myself may be going wrong? All I can say is that I never take a single step without thinking carefully and that I get the time to do that. My thinking nowadays takes the form exclusively of prayer, I do not use my reason, but look into my heart.

"Swami's idea of lifting salt from Bhayander would also have involved a similar error. Dharasana is very near from where I am, but I do not let anyone approach even that. When it is ultimately decided to attempt to seize the stocks there, a pilgrim party will start for the purpose after giving public notice of its intention.

"Please do not blame yourself or feel sorry for what you have done because of my criticism. I have written this only to help you in jail, to think and understand the subtle aspects of non-violence and as guidance for the future to Kaka, Narahari and others. But in any case it is good that you have been arrested. You would have had no opportunity of facing bullets and on account of excessive work you would probably have fallen ill. Those who die and those who survive, both classes of persons should be regarded as equally blessed. We need not believe that he alone is blessed, or more so, who gets killed.

"Now take good rest. Make a *takli* of wood and spin on it as much as you can. Khadi stocks have been exhausted. Ask other prisoners also to spin."³⁷

On the way to jail from the court, the crowd of people wanted to garland Mahadev. The white sergeant drove off the prison-van disregarding the people. Because of that some impulsive person threw a stone which hurt the sergeant's chin. He started abusing. Mahadev expressed his regret in a sorrowful voice, but that man's abuses continued. So Mahadev said, "You hit me with that stone, or give it to me. I would hit myself with it, if it quietens you." He understood Mahadev's Satyagrahi's attitude and started talking about other things. When the prison-van was passing the Ashram, Mahadev invited him to come to the Ashram and asked his name. The sergeant asked for a pen to write his name. Just then they reached the gates of the jail. The sergeant was returning the pen when Mahadev insisted on his keeping it as a memento of the incident and asked for the stone, and throwing it out said, "With this please throw away the bitter memories of the incident." The sergeant smiled and said, "That has been already forgotten!"

A letter that came from Calcutta before Mahadev was arrested is worth a mention. A revolutionary organisation, believing in violence titled, "The Awakened Revolutionary Youth Association", wrote it on 2nd April 1930 :

"Our council has passed the following resolution in our Howrah meeting. Please inform Mahatmaji about it :

'To observe the result of the non-violent movement, Bengal suspends the movement for India's freedom, for five years from today, 6th April 1930.

'Letters and orders have been sent to the branches of the organisation and sister organisations to suspend their present activities '™

Sabarmati jail was not new to Babla (Mahadev's son). It was Bapu's routine to go upto the jail gates every morning and evening for a walk with Babla as his 'walking stick' ! But he had never entered the main gate of the jail before. And so when he entered the small window-like door in the main gate and when it was immediately closed, he was surprised. They did not have to wait for long in the jailor's office. The main steel gate inside the jail opened and Mahadev entered from there. Mahadev's prison-garb was not new to Durgaben. But Babla found Kaka 'some what different'. Only his smiling face and affectionate eyes were the same and the hand that was touching his head, cheek and back, was as loving as ever. 'Ba' and 'Kaka' were talking about something but Babla was intensely curious to know about the world inside the jail. And even from the limited time of the interview, sparing time from their talk, Ba and Kaka tried to satisfy that curiosity. Today after sixty years that description is no longer clear, but this author cannot forget that affection or that satisfied look.

In the Sabarmati jail too, as in the Agra jail, Mahadev organised his life according to his Ashram routine. Many comrades participated in the prayers twice a day. Spinning had also begun with other jail tasks. He started to read every available book in the jail. He did not maintain the custom of writing a diary, but he did write down the gist of anything he liked from what he read. The book that he got from Valji Govindji Desai titled, *The Kingdom of God Is within You*, left a very good impression on Mahadev, and so he wrote down an appreciative gist in his note-book.

Before going to jail Mahadev had handed over the responsibility of the struggle to the venerable Ashramite, Imam Saheb. Let us see what was Mahadev's work and responsibility during those days from Gandhiji's words :

"... I must take notice of Mahadev's conviction. In the midst of chaos going under the false name of Government,

Mahadev's arrest was a courteous and reluctant business on the part of the authorities. Though he set ablaze the whole of Gujarat from Viramgam to Dholera and Ahmedabad, the authorities recognised that he was a life giving fire, that they were safer under Mahadev's rule than their own and that he was able to control the forces he had brought into being.

"But Mahadev made it impossible for the authorities to keep him free. The authorities were wide awake. They intercepted the lorry. They had hoped not to find Mahadev in it. But when he saw that the lorry was to be arrested together with its precious load, he got out of the car in which he was following and jumped into the lorry. And so if they were to arrest the lorry they could not help arresting him. Nor could Mahadev help jumping into the lorry under the circumstances. With him was a youth who was to have appeared for his final LL.B. the following day, two were young men from Gujarat College and two were sons of wealthy men. The lorry was given by Ranchhodlal, a millowner, who when warned what might befall the lorry, said, 'What ! Fear about the loss of the lorry when I am prepared to lose all for Swaraj ?'

"Mahadev has got his well-deserved rest. For hundreds of strenuous workers the jail has become a resting house. Mahadev yearned as he says after 'a better fate' but evidently had not yet deserved it."³⁹

After the arrest of Mahadev and Swami Anand, Gandhiji wrote an article titled "My Test" with special reference to the imprisonment of these two which was printed in *Navajivan* on 27th April 1930 :

"The Government has been putting me to a stiff test. It is entitled to do so. The Government perhaps thinks that if it cuts off my hands, I may lose the battle, or, even if I don't, at least I shall be isolated. It would seem to be the right thing in the eyes of the world. And that is why Mahadev was removed and Swami, too, not to mention other old co-workers and some new ones like Bhai Munshi.

"Mahadev and Swami stood for *Young India* and *Navajivan*. Though Swami had left *Navajivan* formally it did not mean that his connection with it was cut off. It is like my connection with the Ashram, which is not broken even though I am no longer among its Trustees. The *Navajivan* means Swami. Even from Bombay he had been looking after *Navajivan*. He took great pains to help Jinnah in serving the untouchables. The activities at Vile-Parle prospered because of his tireless labour in their behalf. And as for Mahadev, the Gujarati people

living near Ahmedabad know his recent work better than I from this distance can know it.

"But what would it matter even if every one of my co-workers was taken to where Mahadev and Swami have been taken? I do not regard myself isolated at all. God is my only friend, philosopher and guide, call Him what I may. I have not embarked upon the present struggle counting upon the strength of Mahadev, Swami, Sardar, or any other person. I remain therefore unconcerned, no matter how many of my co-workers are sent to jail. Why should a weak man worry? The strength of the strong may be destroyed, but who can destroy the strength of the weak?"

"Though a weak man, I feel I am strong too, but I rely in this struggle on God's strength. He guides me in what I eat and drink, in what I speak and write. I, therefore, feel no burden at all. I do not feel the arrest of Mahadev, Swami or Ramniklal. For their part, they will have some rest. They need it. If I must worry, there are Chittagong and Peshawar to worry about. They touch my heart of course, but they do not cause me worry.

"This is a struggle between violence and non-violence. To the extent that I am non-violent in spirit, non-violent remedies will occur to me, and these I shall put before the people so long as I remain free. In my absence also, if the spirit of non-violence has then become general, people will follow non-violent methods. Those who have not come under the spell of non-violence are bound to do so in the end if the true spirit of non-violence comes to prevail among the people."⁴⁰

This jail term of Mahadev ended on 26th January 1931 when Gandhiji, members of the Congress Working Committee and many others were released. Later on they met at Pandit Motilal's place in Allahabad with Pyarelal on 29th January 1931. Mahadev's pronouncement about the experiences of some friends and Ashramites during this movement, portraying the Great Renunciation, clarified his own feelings about this sacrifice. The effect of Gita on his thought and reflection was as evident as his nature of considering himself insignificant while magnifying the smallest merit in others. He related:

"Pyarelal related the thrilling narrative of his experiences (in jail) at night whilst dining on a fare of tomatoes and peas. God Himself had given everyone according to his worth. 'In whatever way men resort to Me, even so do I render to them',⁴¹ has never been so aptly applied in this struggle as hardly ever before in any other incident. I saw Ashram's non-violence personified in Narahari being beaten with *lathi*. Pyarelal's

eleven days' fast for truth and human behaviour, another six days' fast for the Gita, firmness in doing the allotted work in the worst possible health with a temperature of 104°; and eagerness to explain and win over the hearts of monsters like the Jailor, Doctor and the Deputy Jailor. But all this was topped by Gangaben, Maitri, Vasumati and other women from the Ashram. All those made a success of the Gita's daily recital, 'I give the power of selfless action, whereby they come to Me.'⁴² Bapu said, 'These women have made the Ashram immortal. But that these women got the opportunity to practise such austerity and give service to the Ashram shows their capability and the height of their worth. From the bottom of my heart, my head bows to them, and my heart asks God to make me worthy enough to be called their comrade.'⁴³

FOOTNOTES.

1. *CWMG* - 42, p. 434
2. *Ibid.* 43, p. 9
3. *Ibid.* pp. 5-7
4. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, pp. 210 to 213 selected (Guj.)
5. *Ibid.* (Guj.)
6. *Ibid.* pp. 214 to 216 selected (Guj.)
7. Vanmala Desai, *Naraharibhai*, pp.85-86 (Guj.)
8. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 230 (Guj.)
9. *Ibid.* pp. 230 to 232 selected (Guj.)
10. *Ibid.* pp. 255 to 260 selected (Guj.)
11. *CWMG* - 43, p. 68
12. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 261 (Guj.)
13. *Ibid.* p. 262 (Guj.)
14. *Ibid.* pp. 266-67 selected (Guj.)
15. *Young India*, issue of 27th March, 1930
16. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 299 (Guj.)
17. *Ibid.* p. 301 (Guj.)
18. *Ibid.* pp. 303 to 306 selected (Guj.)
19. *Ibid.* pp. 310-11 (Guj.)
20. *Ibid.* p. 312 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, p. 236
21. *Ibid.* pp. 313-14 (Guj.)
22. *Ibid.* p. 313 (Guj.)
23. *Ibid.* pp. 316-17 (Guj.)
24. *Ibid.* pp. 317-18 (Guj.)
25. *Ibid.* p. 321 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, p. 240
26. *Ibid.* pp. 216-17 - Footnotes as well (Guj.)
27. *Ibid.* pp. 322 to 331 selected (Guj.)
28. *Ibid.* pp. 308-309 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, p. 201
29. *Ibid.* p. 335 (Guj.)

30. Ibid. pp. 336-37 (Guj.)
31. *M. D.'s Diary* - 13, p. 338 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, p. 261
32. Ibid. pp. 339-40 selected (Guj.)
33. Ibid. p. 345 (Guj.)
34. Ibid. p. 346 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, p. 288
35. Ibid. p. 352 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, p. 294
36. Ibid. pp. 353 to 355 selected (Guj.)
37. Ibid. pp. 362-63 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 43, pp. 321-22
38. Ibid. p. 314
39. *CWMG* - 43, pp. 359-60
40. Ibid., pp. 346-47
41. Gita - Discourse 4, Verse 11
42. Gita - Discourse 10, Verse 10
43. *M. D.'s Diary* -14, p. 9 (Guj.)

CHAPTER XXX

READY FOR CONFLICT : WELCOME TO SETTLEMENT

Gandhiji was released from jail on 26th January 1931; a second agreement was arrived at with the Viceroy of India on the 27th August and Gandhiji left Bombay Port on the 29th August to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. During these seven months the nation saw the Satyagrahi in a new character. It witnessed that a Satyagrahi is ever ready to accept dignified settlement, as he is to oppose injustice. And he is ready to pass through difficult situations to carry out the conditions of the settlement from his side. The nation remarkably co-operated in helping the Satyagrahi to play this unique role and Mahadev's contribution was also no less in presenting this novel idea to the nation. Mahadev's role in all this was that of taking down Gandhiji's speeches, writing articles for *Navajivan*, of an adviser to Vallabhbhai, of a commentator to the nation and of a negotiator with the opponents. His skilful competence, pleasant language and natural humility illustrated his multi-faceted genius.

The world had never seen such a non-violent struggle which began with the Dandi March and was progressing towards complete independence. It was not only that the Satyagrahis and the citizens suffered on account of that struggle. Even the Government had much to endure. About sixty thousand Satyagrahis in the country suffered imprisonment; but the Government had to arrest those sixty thousand people, they had to be tried in the court; they had to be kept as under trial as well as sentenced prisoners. The Government had to establish new prisons for them, they had to decide about whom to keep where and what 'facilities' were to be given. Thousands of processions were taken out by people, but it must have been a headache for the Government whether to stop them or let them pass. If they decided to stop them, they had to determine at what point to do so. How much force to use to prevent them from going further had to be decided. Moreover, men, women, young and old, all were

participating in this struggle. Handling the 'monkey' brigades (Vanar Sena) of boys and girls posed another problem. What type of juvenile prisons to put up, how to accommodate women prisoners, all these problems must have been a source of harassment to the Government. There was also a fundamental difference in the execution of orders in the two sides. The Satyagrahis were offering themselves willingly and the desire to be drawn into the struggle enthusiastically was present, while on the Government side, it was merely performing a duty, without any thought about its merit. All was for their livelihood. If there were two types of Satyagrahis, viz. leaders and workers, there were two types of officers, viz. British and Indian in the Government. It was natural that there was a lot of variety of temperaments among persons of both sides. The conflict of the two philosophies of Satyagraha and Imperialism affected the conduct and behaviour of each group. For one side, suffering became either an inspiration to bear greater suffering or a cause for fatigue and weakness, while for the other side the infliction of suffering brought forth feelings of disdain, anger and cruelty, as well as sympathy and at times even repentance. It would be an interesting psychological study as to whether it is physical pain or mental anguish which saps a man's strength. We have to note that the national movement against the Salt Law which went on for about ten to eleven months was tiring for both parties to the conflict. Looking at it in retrospect after a period of sixty years, it can be said that the total result of the struggle was that the people developed a greater awareness and became stronger than before while the Government realised the necessity to become less oppressive in their rule. The central theme of this chapter, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, was the result of such a struggle.

The main reasons for the release of Gandhiji and other national leaders were efforts of national negotiators like Mukund Rao Jaykar and Tej Bahadur Sapru; policies of the Cabinet in England under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald of the Labour Party, and the sympathy for India aroused in the whole world by the Dandi March and the movement, that followed.

Pandit Motilal Nehru was on his death-bed in Anand Bhavan at Allahabad. Gandhiji went straight to Allahabad from Poona. He called Mahadev there. Mahadev had developed a lot of respect for Pandit Motilal when he was working for *The Independent*. Pandit Motilal had also affection for Mahadev. Mahadev was released on the 26th and he caught a train for Allahabad on the 27th. He reached at eleven in the morning of the 29th. His first sentence in his diary reads, "I saw Bapu." It is said that Shri Krishna appeared before Tulsidas when he was passing prayerful days in Vrja.

On seeing Him, with the *Sudarshan Chakra*, Tulsidas merely said :

“Tulsi will bow his head,

When You will take a bow and arrow in Your hand.”

The first page of that diary is full of ‘Bapu’.

Mahadev became agitated when he saw the swollen face of Pandit Motilal. Even from the bed he welcomed Mahadev with his usual delight. He started talking about the doctors . . . “These doctors come, they examine me, and go to talk in the next room as if they have nothing to do with me I told them ‘You are not a veterinarian and I am not a horse.’ ”

Then he said, “As you two are now free, whatever you do, will be as it should be.”¹

Pandit Motilal agreed to go out of Allahabad for treatment on Gandhiji’s advice. Gandhiji told him that he would nurse him, and said, “Call me whenever you wish to see me, night or day — any time.”²

Ghansyamdas Birla came there. He wanted to know whether Gandhiji was ready to do so even if nothing was going to result from it. “Regarding salt, I only want to ask that the poor people should be allowed to manufacture salt — they may maintain and keep their salt-pans for the present.” Referring to the demand for the abolition of the monopoly of the manufacture of salt Gandhiji said, “No, at present I do not want that people like Birlaji should get the right to start companies to manufacture salt.”³ Gandhiji discovered that the businessmen agreed with the eleven points he had put before the Viceroy and so he asked them to pass a resolution accordingly. Birla and Mahadev were asked to prepare a draft.

On the subject of the national situation, Motilal commented, “People have become quite disciplined.” Gandhiji said, “And the movement is also getting along by itself.”³

In the evening at Pandit Motilal Nehru’s place during prayers, Gandhiji told Mahadev, “It is after one year that I have heard you pray.” Mahadev thus was prompted to sing the *bhajan* by Surdas, ‘O God, Please do not take my defects into account.’

At night Gandhiji said, “This time I felt sad at leaving the jail. I felt as if many things which were begun were left undone, and out here there is no question of rest !”⁴

Immediately on his arrival, Gandhiji took the Ashramites who were with him right and left. He observed closely his dinner brought by Pyarelal — bread, vegetable and almonds (with their skins removed) on a tin plate used in jail with hot water in a tin bowl. He said with displeasure, “You have not cleaned the bottom of the plate, have you ?” Mahadev said, “I was reminded of many such incidents.

Pyarelal must have had a difficult time ! I also had such difficulty at other times !”⁴

Mahadev also came for his share of chiding. Brijkrishna Chandiwala had wired of his arrival from Delhi and yet neither Mahadev nor Pyarelal went to the station to receive him. He scolded both of us and said, “You both are careless and forgetful. I saw many instances of Pyarelal’s forgetfulness in jail. Why did none of you go to receive him ? We enjoy everything when we go to him that is our right — but we need not do even so much for him ? You have not understood the concept of non violence at all. If he did not want you at the station, why did he send a telegram ?”⁵

One after another the members of the Congress Working Committee started coming to Allahabad. Many leaders who had returned from the First Round Table Conference also gathered there. The Congress desired complete independence so that total withdrawal from the Empire could be possible; whereas the Government was not even ready to give Dominion Status to India. The Congress Working Committee also wanted an independent inquiry into the police oppression during the 1930 movement.

Young India was confiscated on the 4th of February 1931. Gandhiji said, “I am not surprised by this.”

The Government had released Gandhiji, members of the Congress Working Committee and some other leaders. It was possible that this step was taken on their return to India to impress the members of the First Round Table Conference held in London. But Government’s oppressive measure continued. On one hand Gandhiji said, “I can only emphasize what I have been saying, that continuous repression, about which evidences are daily accumulating makes it wellnigh impossible to contemplate peace . . . the senior officers of the Political Departments defend the conduct of the police and wilfully . . . shut their eyes to every thing said on behalf of the public — and that the Director of Public Information had become a tool in the hands of unscrupulous officials who have not hesitated to add falsehood to their barbarity.”⁶

On the other hand he wrote a venerable Ashramite — Gangaben Vaidya, who was battered by police *lathis* at Baroda :

“How shall I compliment you ? You have shown that you are what I had always thought you were. How I would have smiled with pleasure to see your sari made beautiful with stains of blood. I got excited when I knew about this atrocity, but was not pained in the least. On the contrary, I felt happy.

“I would have certainly felt unhappy if none of you were among the victims of that assault. I know that there is (ignorant) attachment to the Ashram even if I tried to do so.

The shortcomings of the inmates of the Ashram are intolerable to me. Likewise, I feel happier when I see the virtues of others. Is it a great thing that you did not feel angry with those who hurt you? Would you be angry with Kaku if he beat you? These others who beat you were also your sons, who had become blind through ignorance.”

Pandit Motilal died at Lucknow on the 6th February. The body was taken to Allahabad. On one hand preparations for the funeral were going on, on the other, Gandhiji was talking to K. T. Shah about the latter's experience of the Round Table Conference.

The Viceroy's reply came to the effect that an inquiry into police oppression could not be permitted. Pandit Malaviya said, “Why can't we be satisfied at the oppression being stopped? How can they allow such an inquiry?” Gandhiji said a bit impatiently, “Do you believe we should go on tolerating molestation of our women?” Malaviya said, “No.” “Then why do you desire to weaken me? I am ready for them even to do a little in the matter . . . I would accept an inquiry even in a few incidents. But has any Collector been removed? No senior Police Officer has been dismissed.” One after another many representatives, who had been to the First Round Table Conference, came to see Gandhiji. Out of these, he wrote in reply to a telegram from Shrinivas Shastri:

“The atmosphere in India does not seem to me to support your and other friend's jubilation. I would like, however, to feel that there was no foundation for my tears. You may come whenever you are free.”

Shastri also talked of a compromise like many others who had returned from the Round Table Conference. He left an impression of being a very simple and a straightforward man. Gandhiji persuaded him, Jaykar and Sapru to make all possible efforts to save Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, from being sentenced to death. Gandhiji himself believed in the total abolition of the death sentence. How could he support death sentence for a patriotic young man like Bhagat Singh? No doubt, he did not support Bhagat Singh's method of working, but that did not stop him from going all out to get his sentence mitigated. This effort had begun before he met the Viceroy, Lord Irwin.

The talks about a compromise were going on, and when people heard that Gandhiji would go to see the Viceroy, they showered him with letters welcoming the negotiations. Sir Prabhaskar Pattani, Diwan of Bhavnagar, sent both a letter and a telegram. The reply Gandhiji sent to him on 16th February 1931, reveals his attitude very aptly:

"One need not advise the teeth to take care not to hurt the tongue. I feel like that real mother in the story. Was she not ready to let go her claim to her son that he may remain alive? Surely, women being dragged by their hair and boys being whipped for no crime, cannot make me happy. I am, therefore, eager to go to any length to secure peace. If, however, that peace is going to be like the peace between the wolf and the lamb, rather than accept it, I would let women be dishonoured, the backs of innocent people stained with blood, people's homes looted and innocent people hanged. I always pray to God that I, who am standing at Death's door, may not put my signature to anything which might prove a trap for the country. I am going to Delhi to-day with this prayer in my heart. I do not feel presumptuous like the dog in the story who was walking under the cart. I know the limits of my strength. I am but a particle of dust. Even such particle has a place in God's creation, provided it submits to being trodden on. Everything is done by that Supreme Potter. He may use me as He wills, whether it is victory or defeat, it will be His. There is, therefore, no question of defeat, or say rather, that it is ever defeat for us.

"I think I have written enough. I have been able to write even as much as I have done because today is my silence day. But all this is by way of preface. My intention in writing this letter was to request you to persuade the Princes to acknowledge the rights of their subjects. They wish to be partners, will they not, then, agree to give an account of their actions to their other partners?

"How much did Lady Pattani spin and how much Khadi did she sell?"¹⁰

The simile of a Potter again appears in a different way in a short letter written to the Ashramites while on his way to Delhi.

"To-morrow is the meeting with the Viceroy. Everything happens spontaneously. What shape it will take can be known only by the Supreme Potter."¹¹

On the 17th February Gandhiji got down at Gaziabad and went to Delhi in a car. The negotiations between the people's representative and the Emperor's representative went on for fifteen days from the 19th February. Mahadev was not present during the actual negotiations. But daily Gandhiji related the gist of the talks, as he remembered them to Mahadev and all those members of the Congress Working Committee who were present at his place of residence. It is not known whether the Viceroy had any of his secretaries present or not. Mostly Lord Irwin and Mahatma Gandhi

met alone. Later on the Viceroy also made notes of the daily talks. Sir Winston Churchill, the Leader of the Opposition in the British Parliament had expressed his annoyance at the nouseating spectacle of a half-naked fakir striding the steps of the Viceregal Palace to parley on equal terms with the representative of His Imperial Majesty . . . It is only from Mahadev's daily notes that many details of the day to day negotiations between these two apparently, totally unequal representatives are available

When he was leaving Allahabad, Gandhiji told the members of the Working Committee that if some positive result were expected during the negotiations with the Viceroy he would call the members to Delhi. Mahadev wrote in a letter to Sardar Vallabhbhai on 25th February :

"What should I write to you and when ? Every hour the situation keeps on changing and I am constantly surrounded by people. The talks with the Viceroy were very pleasant, open and friendly.

"There was a lot of conflict about the terms of the Pact. But the Viceroy put forward the Government's difficulties, conceding that our demands were just. Then the Viceroy cabled the gist of the entire talks to the Secretary of State for India and now Irwin is awaiting his cable. Here, it is said that he had convinced all concerned and it is also said that he has acted with patience and courage. It is also said that Bapu influenced him a lot. But we have yet to see what the outcome will be. The Viceroy had liked the suggestion of the trio (Sapru, Jaykar and Shastri) to hold an unofficial meeting before the second 'Conference', but it cannot be done till permission is received from the Secretary of State for India, which has not come yet. Bapu has accepted to participate in that meeting and to explain the entire stand taken by the Congress with the premise that a Satyagrahi always keeps his cards open. There was a slight difference of opinion regarding this in the Congress Working Committee that Bapu can make any changes, on his own, in the conditions of the compromise in this Conference

"Whatever else, apart from this, you might have read in the papers, is all false. Peasants have become impatient, traders have become impatient, Satyagrahis have weakened — but what can be done ? Should you stop the motion of a train once it has started ?"¹²

Some members were in Delhi from the very first day. Others arrived immediately on being sent for by Gandhiji. The Working Committee met every day during the negotiations. Gandhiji reported his talks with the Viceroy to them daily and listened to every point

and opinion expressed by the Working Committee members. At times it used to be midnight when Gandhiji returned from the Viceregal Palace. One day it was one a.m. The Working Committee members were awakened from their sleep and were given the report. The negotiations went on in such a way that no one knew what the result would be — even the two stalwarts, who were negotiating did not know. The whole nation was waiting with bated breath for the result.

The struggle was going on even when the negotiations were under way, the workers were privately instructed not to stop the activities but not to start any new ones. The Government oppression was also in evidence. Arrests, confiscations, harassments, sale of farmers' lands with standing crops, police guards on crops, beating those who tried to reap the crops — all these things were continuing.

During the talks Gandhiji raised the point that an inquiry should be held into all the acts of brutality committed by the police. The Viceroy was not ready for any such inquiry. And it appeared that the negotiations would break down on this point. Gandhiji said, "When you or Mr. Emerson, use your best arguments it does not always have much effect on me, but, when you tell me that Government is in a difficulty and cannot do what I want, then I am inclined to capitulate to you."³ Gandhiji told the Working Committee that he did not consider it proper to break the negotiations on this point, but if the Working Committee insisted on it he would gladly act as its agent and break the negotiations. The Working Committee gave up its insistence in the face of Gandhiji's attitude.

Another similar issue was the peasants' right to recover lands annexed by the Government. Gandhiji told the Viceroy that in Gujarat he was successful because of Vallabhbhai and so if he (Vallabhbhai) was not satisfied in this matter, he (Gandhiji) was prepared to give up the negotiations. The Viceroy was ready to return the lands if they were not given away to other farmers; but the Viceroy had reservations about the lands already sold. When the struggle was on in Bardoli and Borsad, the Viceroy had promised the Government of Bombay that under no circumstances would the sold land be taken back. At last a solution to this was found that if a third party got the buyer to return the land to the peasant, the Government would not only not object but help wherever possible.

Gandhiji insisted that the right of the people for silent picketing of liquor shops and shops of foreign cloth should be recognised. Moreover, in the areas where natural salt is available, the local people should get the right of picking up, manufacturing and selling that salt. Those Patels and Talatis who had resigned from service on

account of the movement, should be re-instated. This issue did not give rise to much difficulty.

"The most important issue however was in relation to constitutional reforms. After long and numerous discussions, Gandhiji agreed, in anticipation of the concurrence of the Working Committee, that the next Round Table Conference should be called to further discuss the constitutional scheme, which had been placed before the First Round Table Conference, that federation should be regarded as an integral part of the scheme outlined at the Conference, and that likewise, provisions relating to the defence of the country, foreign relations, position of minorities, the settlement of India's debt, and some other questions affecting the welfare and safety of India should be accepted as fundamental to the scheme. Just as the Sardar found it difficult to accept the solution relating to the lands, so also Jawaharlalji was dissatisfied about the political constitution. Regarding the release of those arrested, only the Satyagrahi prisoners were to be released. The cases of the others were to be examined, individually, and in any event, no one who was responsible for attacking soldiers or police was to be released. The members of the Working Committee, generally, were dissatisfied. Gandhiji, however, maintained that, 'When we are anxious to effect a settlement, we cannot expect everything to go our way. Nevertheless, if the Working Committee is desirous of breaking up the discussions on any one or more issues, I am quite prepared to accept that.' Finally, all the members accepted Gandhiji's advice, and even Jawaharlalji, who was opposed to this settlement, accepted it placing his reliance entirely on Gandhiji and his unerring judgment."¹⁴

Gandhiji began to hear stories that people had used considerable force during picketing of the shops of foreign cloth. He explained about the vice that had infiltrated picketing, to the members of the Working Committee. He explained that it is barbarous and violent to cry 'shame shame', to forcibly snatch away cloth from the people, to crawl round a man clad in foreign clothes and not allow him to move, to abuse anyone, to lie down before vehicles and to burn effigies.

Remembering a past incident Gandhiji said that 'to refuse to remove a dead body from the house of someone who had not participated in non-co operation was also a kind of violence'. He had once told Shaikat Ali that Gandhiji could not work with a person who did such a thing. Jawaharlal had understood this. He had said that open violence was better than this. But Sengupta and some other

Working Committee members felt that picketing would weaken if such limitations were placed."¹⁵

One day during the negotiations a difficulty arose and Gandhiji asked the Viceroy to confirm his position in writing. The note sent by him (the Viceroy) was extremely stiff and the Congress Working Committee dismissed it as 'miserly'.

That night (28.2.1931) Mahadev took that note to Shastri. He was also taken aback at the Government draft. Shastri was keen that on no account must the negotiations break down.

In the morning Shastri made a very poignant appeal to the Working Committee. Mahadev used phrases in his note, to describe that appeal such as, 'intensely emotional, true yet humble'.

Many did not understand Gandhiji's words, 'they should exonerate us' with reference to the inquiry about police oppression. Gandhiji said that he was not interested in the police being punished, but was interested in the Satyagrahis being considered innocent of having used force. Jawaharlal said that they understood that but there was a tinge of sanctimoniousness in it.

Many people returning from the First Round Table Conference came and insisted on not allowing the negotiations to break down in any case. Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto came and said, "The Viceroy does not want to break them off. You don't do so. Many leading Englishmen have told my wife to come and persuade Gandhi not to break off the negotiations."¹⁶

On the same day the Viceroy apologised for the stiffness and rude tone of his former letter. He introduced Gandhiji to H. W. Emerson, Secretary, Home Department, Government of India. Gandhiji believed that he was the man who was throwing spokes in the smoothly moving wheels of the negotiation and said that he would like to shut both of them up in a room to be released only when they came to an agreement. In the evening the Viceroy insisted that Gandhiji should dine with him. Gandhiji asked for some warm water, lemon and salt, so Lord Irwin said with a smile, "Here you will not get tax free salt."¹⁷

Ambalal and Sarladevi came one day to see Gandhiji. Gandhiji told them, "You cannot sell the interest of the nation because people are tired."

Once Mahadev went to see Bapu with Jamnalalji. They waited on the road outside the Viceregal Lodge till twelve-thirty at night, when Bapu eventually appeared. On the way back he said, "There is a lot of difficulty about the return of the land to the farmers. Irwin says that he himself has given a written promise, nevertheless, he will personally write to the Governor (to do something in the matter)." He said about picketing, "Stiff letters have come to me

from local Governments. If nothing else, give me a 'Gentleman's Word' " Stop the picketing for six weeks " I said, "That cannot be stopped even for a day. I may stop it for the two or three days of the truce, but certainly not for six weeks " Regarding salt, it was decided to meet Schuster and devise a policy.

Bapu was astonished at the Viceroy's zest for work The Viceroy asked, "Shall I now sleep peacefully ?"

Bapu : "Certainly."

Viceroy : "And should I take it for granted that you will do the same ?"

Bapu : "I never have trouble in sleeping."

Viceroy : "What a lot of anxiety we had to go through in this matter ? How can I describe the anguish ? Who suffered more ? You or I ?"

Bapu : "I do not want to enter a competition."

Viceroy : "Will you come to see me off at Bombay ?"

Bapu . "Certainly. If I am there, I shall come."

We reached home at one thirty at night The Working Committee meeting went on upto 2.45 and Bapu slept at three "19

The above incidents have been narrated to give an idea of the atmosphere during the time of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Gandhiji and Lord Irwin both were religious-minded; each had faith in the other's integrity; both understood the importance of compromise, and both made untiring efforts to ensure that the negotiations did not break down and so at last the Pact was signed on 5th March 1931. That evening Gandhiji dictated a statement to prominent national and international journalists. Mahadev notes :

"For nearly an hour and a half the flow of speech went on without a break He paused for a minute whilst talking about the rulers of the native states as he did not recollect the word 'uncompromising'. All around him people listened to him, spell-bound; others were taking his photographs, but unconcerned Bapu continued speaking. I too took down the whole statement During the compromise it did not appear so promising, but it appeared so now The whole statement could be described as a Miracle of Non-violence, and the tone of it was that the origin of the compromise was in non-violence "

Bapu said at night, "When I am full of one subject there is a ceaseless flow. I do not have to stop anywhere."²⁰

Negotiations and Pacts are not easy things to accomplish On one side it involves maintaining one's principles and self-respect, while on the other one has to understand the difficulties of the opponents and display the greatest amount of generosity. A balance

is required between the two opposing forces in good negotiations and good agreements.

To fulfil the conditions of an agreement, considering all its aspects is even more difficult than arriving at it. In the agreement arrived at by Gandhiji the condition that the annexed lands that were sold would not be returned, was one which was unpalatable to the Sardar. The condition that those prisoners who were accused of violence were not to be released was difficult for Jawaharlal to accept and from the constitutional viewpoint the issues accepted by the First Round Table Conference were to remain as they were. Gandhiji believed that without the support of these two people, his wings would be clipped. Both Sardar and Jawahar were moving about in Gujarat and the United Provinces respectively, and were making tireless efforts to explain to the people the details of the Pact, to see that the conditions of the Pact were carried out and to correct the situation if they were not carried out. On the 11th of June of that year when Jawaharlal met the Europeans staying in Bombay he explained, very poignantly, the importance of all this effort.

‘This struggle is elemental. It has spread to every corner of the country, and it is not only Gandhiji’s struggle, but all people are involved in it.’ Referring to the Constitution he said, “When you discuss the Constitution, it is like talking about the polish in a shoe without knowing where it pinches.” When asked why he was always talking of battle, he said, “‘Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.’ If that is correct, about the price of liberty that is achieved, what could be the price of liberty that is yet to be achieved?”²

Lord Irwin had signed the Pact against the wishes of many of the officers of the Government. It appeared as if the officers had no intention of carrying out the conditions of the compromise. Some believed that greater persecution of the Government officers had been practised by the non co operators than the other way round.³ Officers from the ranks of Patel, Talati, Collector, Commissioner to the highest officers in the Viceroy’s Secretariat were clever enough to put obstacles in the way of carrying out a decision if it went against their desire.

But there was a tremendous difference in the attitude of both the sides. On one side Vallabhbhai’s attitude was that of a soldier and so he had decided to act according to Gandhiji’s orders without any arguments, while on the other, Jawaharlal had accepted the compromise because of his love for Bapu, and so once the agreement was signed he had not complained about it even once. On the Government side, the officers who disliked the agreement did not feel any remorse in breaking it at every possible occasion. This was the fundamental difference in the attitudes of the people and the

Government To add to the trouble, a month and a quarter after the Pact, Lord Irwin's term was over Gandhi bade him a farewell before Lord Irwin left Bombay. Mahadev describes the occasion thus :

"Bapu told me about his talk with the 'Viceroy' in the morning, when I gave him the note on the interview with the Governor. The Viceroy told the same thing that I had told him in Delhi I had told him, 'I have faith that I am safe in your hands' He said, 'My reputation is entirely in your hands You will protect me against my enemies here and in England.'

"The Viceroy repeatedly told Bapu that he 'must go to England' A lot can be accomplished after going there"²²

Lord Willingdon replaced Irwin as the Viceroy He was well-versed in the administration of an Imperialist State and who was sympathetic to the officers Narahari wrote about him

" . . Lord Irwin left India and he was succeeded on 18th April 1931 by Lord Willingdon who knew India well as he had already been successively Governor of Bombay and of Madras. He understood the mentality of the British in India Whether he agreed with them or not, his natural inclination was to support them His attitude to this settlement, therefore, as also towards Gandhi and Lord Irwin was clear from certain observations, which he is believed to have made at this period, such as the following 'Irwin was a simple man who was deluded by this intriguing Bania I would not pay the slightest heed to his (Gandhi's) view' On another occasion he is reported to have stated, 'This cunning chap, Gandhi, always succeeded in putting me in the wrong' Anyone who approached the Indian problem in this prejudiced frame of mind could scarcely be expected to help in its solution In Willingdon's time the permanent officials got a free hand."²³

In this situation Gandhi's policy was that of a purely non-violent man He adopted a policy that our side should strictly observe the condition of the compromise and should put up with any extra suffering as a result of that, and should inform the Government of any breach of the compromise on their side Vallabhbhai acting in the manner of an ideal soldier, insisted on the farmers following the conditions of the compromise in spite of his being a witness to the farmers being brutally treated.

On returning to Gujarat from Delhi, Gandhi met the farmers of Borsad and Bardoli with the Sardar Gandhi said in Borsad

"This Settlement is not the end of the struggle That will come only after securing Swaraj And perhaps it may not come even after Swaraj has been secured, because an occasion may

arise when Satyagraha may have to be offered against the Swaraj Government. The Settlement which has been made now is a step forward in our journey towards Swaraj. The settlement has been arrived at in the hope that what has now to be secured will be done through talks, discussions and negotiations. I do not recall having said anything, or the Sardar having said anything, about compensating you for your losses. If any volunteer had given you such hope, I must admit that he had done so thoughtlessly. You must not hold the (Congress) Committee or the Sardar or me responsible for it."²⁴

Mahadev wrote about the four days he spent with Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai in Kheda and Bardoli:

"Those were the days of unmitigated pleasure. You need a Valmiki to describe what happened in these villages during the last year, what offerings they gave in the national sacrifice; but today when we are nearing the completion of that sacrifice, you need divine imagination to describe the sights. But I saw them not with the eyes moistened at the sight with tears of joy. My heart became more humble when I saw the total absence of pride in spite of having sacrificed and suffered to their utmost, and I explained how fortunate it would have been if we had even an iota of the supreme faith of these good peasants. The Sardar moved about in every village and praising their sacrifice said, 'You have suffered a lot but you have gained honour and fame which few others can get.' I do not think those people even thought of that honour or fame. Brailsford made Bardoli and Kheda immortal in America and Britain. But what would those peasants know about it? The peasants would not get fame by going to prison, nor would they have the leisure or at times even the knowledge to read the papers if they were featured in the news. In these circumstances a thousand thanks to those farmers who put up with untold sufferings on the word of one whom they placed along with God in their hearts!"²⁵

Mahadev was terribly pained at seeing the miseries of the refugees:

"These proud oxen who drew the carts, these infants in their cribs, these girls spinning on the spinning-wheels — Oh! Even these spinning-wheels have played a novel part in the national sacrifice. Would we feel more emotional at the going away of Shakuntala, or at the refugees bidding farewell to Anshu? When I think of this I forget my Ashram, my constant stay in the cool shade of Gandhiji and the world around it, and wish for a moment how fortunate it would be if I was one of these simple, guileless, contented peasants with faith. . ."²⁶

After the compromise Ravishankar Vyas (Maharaj) and Chhaganlal Joshi looked into the questions of the Borsad farmers. Ravishankar Maharaj knew the people of Kheda district very well. Joshi was well-versed in sociology and economics. Both brought the facts gathered by them to Mahadev. Mahadev prepared a note for the Government.

In a very large meeting at the Azad Maidan in Bombay on the 17th March 1931 Gandhiji discussed the main elements of Satyagraha and compromise :

"The Satyagrahi whilst he is ever ready for fight must be equally eager for peace. . . He must welcome any honourable opportunity for peace. The Working Committee of the Congress saw such an opportunity and availed itself of it. The essential condition of a compromise is that there should be nothing humiliating, nothing panicky about it. You may be sure that whilst I was being inundated with telegrams to make peace at any price, I was absolutely unmoved by them. I am inured to such things and I was absolutely firm that I must not allow any of these telegrams to make me flinch from whatever decision my inner voice gave me. Whilst, however, a Satyagrahi never yields to panic or hesitancy, neither does he think of humiliating the other party, of reducing it to an abject surrender. He may not swerve from the path of justice and may not dictate impossible terms. He may not pitch his demands too high, neither may he pitch them too low. The present settlement, I submit, satisfies all these conditions."²⁷

It should be mentioned here that all officers were not alike. There were some who were honestly trying to observe the conditions of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the Congress Party. Kheda's Collector, Perry, was one such officer. Hailey, the Governor of United Provinces, tried to be extremely accommodating, while Bombay's Governor and his advisers like Garret, Commissioner of Northern Area, were putting impediments in the way of fulfilling the conditions of the Pact. Mahadev wrote to Sardar on 4th May from Borsad :

"Yesterday I had gone to the Collector at the time of the post, and so I told Pyara to write to you. I have become quite friendly with the Collector. But how long can friendship with these people be retained?" He likes my reports. But when he reads the one about Raas he would be shocked. The work that has been accomplished in Raas has been unparalleled in the whole of India is what I have witnessed only yesterday. I was with the farmers till one-thirty at night. No one has left the village. But they have removed some things and resolved not to

bring them back till Bapu returns from the Round Table Conference and brings Swaraj. It is said that if we heard about the tortures suffered and the courage shown by the people of Raas, we will shed unmitigated tears. But now Bapu will allow me to write about them or that farmer from Mamania at the present point of time."

Mahadev wrote with P. S. at the end of the letter :

"For me this field has been made available for my work as it happened in the case of Bardoli; even if Bapu banishes me to a distance for Raas, I would not mind".²⁸

More than once Gandhiji entrusted Mahadev the work of observing whether the conditions of the Pact were being fulfilled in Surat and Kheda districts and of noting down in detail any irregularities. Mahadev, experienced in the work of the Bardoli Inquiry Committee, felt that had the present officers handled the work with the understanding shown by the officers at that time, things would have been easier. But this time their intentions were not honest. And yet, the people's sense of sacrifice, exertion and faith helped to remove quite formidable impediments from the work. The Collector of the Kheda district was on the whole sympathetic but he had a prejudice about some villages. Mahadev wrote about him :

"The villages that were distrusted by the Collector expressed the hurt the people there experienced for the want of confidence in themselves and their workers in a very different way. By the afternoon a few people from each of the three villages came with twelve to thirteen hundred rupees. We took them all to the Collector and told him, 'The people of the village that you distrusted most have come with seven hundred rupees. Do please meet them!' The Collector was thunderstruck. He said, 'This was not necessary.' I said, 'Satyagrahis can express their hurt only in this manner, some of them might have borrowed the money by giving interest, but what else could they do when it became a question of their honour and reputation?' The Collector came out, called the people and said in Hindi, 'I am very happy. You people have been put to a lot of trouble. You came in the burning sun. No notices will be served on you.' Afterwards he wrote a note to the Mamlatdar."²⁹

Mahadev considered the work, of moving around the villages, explaining the Pact to the people and preparing them for further sacrifice as an act of service. He wrote :

"I told the people in two sentences : 'We want to be honest. We must tell the Government honestly that this many can pay, others cannot and you will have to give them relief for

some time We have to inspire confidence in the Government and want to tell them that we cannot give whatever you tell us to pay; but if our case is right we will pay according to our capacity and you will have to take it ' People have grasped this. If we do not hear about the bravery of Raas, if we do not see the pleasure of the people of Raas, we will shed unlimited tears if we hear what the people of Raas have endured."³⁰

Mahadev felt content as the work was progressing though slowly, through the people's efforts.

Mahadev did not only persuade the people, he also talked to the officers. It was because of his persuasion that one of the Government's plans was abandoned. The plan was to reward the substitute Patels and Talatis who were working in place of those who resigned during the movement of 1930, and were taken back, in spite of the fact that they had oppressed the people.

Once though, Mahadev's method of getting work done from the officers through persuasion achieved only partial success. He wrote about the understanding with Kothawala, the Collector of Bardoli :

"Mr Perry solved the intricate problem of Raas through talks and negotiations, but it was beyond the capacity of Kothawala to solve Bardoli's problem — perhaps it was beyond his power. A number of notices were served. Gandhiji was upset and sent me to Surat. In Surat I met Kothawala with Mohanlal Pandya on the 9th July. The talks were very congenial, we arrived at some understanding. On account of this understanding, he agreed to send us a list of people who had to be sent the notices, and I returned to Bombay."³¹

Gandhiji had told this Collector once, "I have no personal grievance towards you. You are only an instrument." The Collector replied to this, "I am not even an instrument, I am only a pawn."³²

Gandhiji believed that in spite of his promise to Lord Irwin, he would not be able to go to the Second Round Table Conference if there was no understanding about communal friendship and no assurance about the implementation of the Pact. The Congress Working Committee, specially Maulana Azad insisted that he should go even if there was no communal friendship. Gandhiji met the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, about the implementation of the Pact. Initially it appeared that the talks had broken down, but at the very last moment there was a compromise, the Viceroy arranged for a special train to arrive at Bombay on 27th August 1931 so that Gandhiji could board S S *RAJPUTANA*. Millions collected on Bombay Port to see Gandhiji — their leader — who was going to England without much hope. Mahadev's description of that farewell is very simple and personal, but that makes it all the more poignant.

"Met Durga, Babla at home Durga looked happy. We reached the boat at 12 o'clock after lot of hustling Babla and Durga were with me Babla came on the boat and said, "Kaka, how can there be so many houses on the boat?" Babla was totally upset at the large crowd of people.

"The people of Bombay gave a unique send off. Bapu stood on the deck till the steamer left at one o'clock.

"Durga was standing beside one who had put on a saffron-coloured sari Taking that as clue, I kept on looking at her till I could Then at last the scene disappeared from my sight"³³

We have reviewed the events which form the pivot of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and its implementation from the time Gandhiji and Mahadev were released from the prison on 26th January 1931, till 29th August when they left the Bombay Port to go to the Second Round Table Conference Going back a little chronologically, two other important events with which Mahadev was concerned were the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his comrades and the Congress Session held at Karachi in March 1931.

Gandhiji could not save Bhagat Singh from hanging in spite of the Pact with Lord Irwin Many young men were terribly agitated because of this and there were demonstrations against Gandhiji at many places on the entire route from Delhi to Karachi. Mahadev was keen to clarify to the country, Gandhiji's attitude in this matter

Gandhiji was an admirer of Bhagat Singh's courage, patriotism and devotion to truth, although he did not like his method of violence Gandhiji was against the sentence of death for Bhagat Singh and others So before he went to meet the Viceroy, he requested Jaykar and Sapru who were rather close to the Viceroy, to do something Both had assured Gandhiji that they would try their best The negotiations with the Viceroy referred to the situation created by the civil disobedience movement because of the Complete Independence Resolution of the Congress The discussion centred on the basis of the conditions for the stoppage of the struggle So Gandhiji could not talk about Bhagat Singh and others as a part of these talks. But he had discussed it as an independent subject with the Viceroy Lord Irwin, more than once The Viceroy was not prepared to give in at all on this question As Gandhiji did not consider this subject an integral part of the negotiations, the question of breaking off the negotiations did not arise The talk was based only on the humanitarian angle and the Viceroy's insistence on sticking to the political angle was obstructing the humanitarian viewpoint Nowhere do we find, either in Mahadev's notes or elsewhere that the Viceroy accepted that the death sentence was improper for anyone from a humanitarian viewpoint The Viceroy

had consented to delay Bhagat Singh's execution till the Congress Session, if Gandhiji so wanted, keeping in mind that negotiations were going on and Gandhiji's attitude was going to influence the Congress Session. Gandhiji did not consider it honest to stop the sentence for the time being and then to hang the victims and so he did not encourage that suggestion.

At many places on the way to Karachi, people asked Gandhiji sarcastically as to where he had left Bhagat Singh! Young men were standing on Malir station shouting, 'What got Bhagat Singh hanged? Gandhi's compromise.' They surrounded Gandhiji as he got down at the station. Devdas was pushed aside roughly when he broke their cordon. They were going to shower black flowers on Gandhiji, but as he asked for the flowers, they put them in his hand. Gandhiji said, "They showed fairly good restraint. They could have made much more noise but they did not do so."

Malaviyaji said, "Why should we not tell them about Bapu's writing a letter to the Viceroy?" Mahadev asked Gandhiji. He said, "That is the work of Jawaharlal and Subhash. They must tell them what all we have done for them."

Mahadev hoped that if the young men knew what great efforts Gandhiji had made to save Bhagat Singh, they would have been sorry for the demonstrations against him and would have tried to recompense their mistake. He also wrote, "In the last few years the British Government has not been known to have attained fame for any action which might have displayed their magnanimity, but Gandhiji had expected that Lord Irwin, though closely connected with the Government would understand the times and give a solid proof of the Government's intention to bring about lasting peace. The letter written to the Viceroy at the dawn of the 23rd was written with a pen dipped in ink of love and was addressed to the generosity of a great Christian."³⁴

What was there in the letter referred to by Mahadev? The letter is printed in the page number 333 of the Volume Number 45 in the published series of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

"1, Daryaganj Delhi
March 23, 1931

Dear Friend,

It seems cruel to inflict this letter on you, but the interest of peace demands a final appeal. Though you were frank enough to tell me that there was little hope of your commuting the sentence of death of Bhagat Singh and two others, you said you would consider my submission on Saturday. Dr. Sapru met me yesterday and said that you were troubled over the matter and taxing your brain as to the proper course to adopt. If there

is any room left for reconsideration, I invite your attention to the following :

Popular opinion, rightly or wrongly demands commutation. When there is no principle at stake, it is often a duty to respect it.

In the present case the chances are that, if commutation is granted, internal peace is most likely to be promoted. In the event of execution, peace is undoubtedly in danger.

Seeing that, I am able to inform you that the revolutionary party has assured me that, in the event of these lives being spared, that party will stay its hands, suspension of sentence pending revolutionary murders becomes in my opinion a pre-emptory duty.

Political murders have been condoned before now. It is worthwhile saving these lives, if thereby many other innocent lives are likely to be saved and may be even revolutionary crime almost stamped out.

Since you value my influence such as it is in favour of peace, do not please unnecessarily make my position difficult as it is, almost too difficult for future work.

Execution is an irretrievable act. If you think there is the slightest chance of error of judgment, I would urge you to suspend for future review an act that is beyond recall.

If my presence is necessary, I can come. Though I may not speak, I may hear and write what I want to say.

'Charity never faileth.'

I am,

Your sincere friend",³⁵

Speaking at the Congress Session on 26th March Gandhiji said

"By the executions the Government have given the nation grave cause for provocation. It has shocked me too as my negotiations and talks had made me entertain a distant hope that Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev might be saved. I am not surprised that young men are angry with me for not having been able to save them. For one thing, this is not the first occasion of its kind in my life. It is the duty of him who claims to serve humanity not to be angry with those whom he is serving. As for myself non-violence being my creed, I cannot afford to be angry with anybody. . .

". . . The young men were simply shouting, 'Gandhi go back', 'Down with Gandhism'. They had a right to do so inasmuch as they thought that I had not done everything in my power to save Bhagat Singh, or that being a believer in *ahimsa*, I had simply neglected Bhagat Singh and his comrades. But

they had no intention to molest me or for the matter of that, anyone else. They allowed every one to pass, and then a young man handed to me flowers made of black cloth. They might have thrown them on me and insulted me, but they had no such intention. . . .

"Those young men wanted to proclaim to the world that however great the Mahatma may be, they were sure that he was doing harm to India. I think they had a right to expose me, if they felt that I was betraying the country. . . .

"I cannot behave otherwise with these young men inasmuch as I want to win them over by love. Having flung aside the sword, there is nothing except the cup of love which I can offer to those who oppose me. It is by offering that cup that I expect to draw them close to me. I cannot think of permanent enmity between man and man, and believing as I do in the theory of rebirth, I live in the hope that if not in this birth, in some other birth I shall be able to hug all humanity in friendly embrace. . . .

". . . I agree that the Government has given sufficient cause for provocation, but I want the impatient youth in the name of God, in the name of our dear Motherland, to throw themselves heart and soul in the non-violent struggle. I ask them to trust my unbroken experience of forty years of the practice of non-violence."³⁶

Mahadev had noted in his diary that (Barrister) Asaf Ali had drafted a petition of mercy for Bhagat Singh. Gandhiji rejected it and drafted a new petition which was in keeping with Bhagat Singh's self-respect.

A year previously Sardar Patel's name was mentioned as the President of the Lahore Congress. But Gandhiji felt that if he was made a President of the Congress immediately after his victory at Bardoli, it would appear as if the Sardar was cashing upon his victory. So he had asked the Congress as to wait for some time. He welcomed the idea of Sardar as the President of the Karachi Congress in 1931. Both the times the Sardar's attitude was that of a soldier. He obeyed the orders of the Commander. For Mahadev the Karachi Congress was a matter of special happiness. And so he gave extensive reports about it in more than one article in *Navajivan*. In those articles over and above the lectures of Gandhiji and the Sardar, he had praised the efforts of Jiramdas Daulatram and his co-workers in the management of the Congress, the co-operation of the Gujaratis of Karachi in the excellent management of the kitchen and the beauty of the 'pavilion with a canopy of the sky' as the session was held in March. The main resolution in this session was about the

fundamental rights of Swaraj moved by Gandhiji. The support of this resolution was taken later on at the time of framing the Constitution for our nation.

Mahadev specially noted and referred to the presence of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and his Khudai Khidmatgars at the Congress and gave prominence to his address whilst reporting to the people. Riots had taken place in Kanpur just prior to the Karachi Congress. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi became a martyr there. Mahadev mentioned this too.

We would note here an incident which Mahadev has purposely not written in his diary. But he had spoken about it to this author and the author's mother.

When it was decided to elect Sardar Vallabhbhai as the President of the Congress he had repeatedly told Mahadev to become the General Secretary of the Congress. Mahadev had nothing to say about this. He only had to smile and look at Gandhiji. And the same Gandhiji who had released Mahadev two years ago for Bardoli, who had sent him (Mahadev) with the Sardar in the Madras and Bihar tours, refused to release Mahadev to become the General Secretary of the Congress. Gandhiji did not keep Mahadev away from himself for one whole year. He was needed in the near future if he (Gandhiji) had to go to England. And Gandhiji knew very well that for Mahadev not politics but Gandhi's work was his self-defined priority.

Mahadev, usually did not write about himself in his diaries. So we have to rummage among Gandhiji's letters to find anything about him.

When Mahadev was in Sabarmati jail, Gandhiji used to mention him in letters he wrote from Yeravda to the Ashram not only to Durgaben but to any Ashramite. In a letter written to Narandas Gandhi he suggests, "Inform Mahadev that he should write, even from the jail, if he can get time and is permitted to write".³⁷

Gandhiji sent a list of books worth reading from Yeravda Mandir for Manilal Gandhi, and wrote to the Ashram Manager :

"Manilal may read what he can and what he finds interesting from above. Or, rather, it is Mahadev who has awakened Manilal's interest in reading. He should, therefore, be guided by Mahadev. . . ."³⁸

Gandhiji expected Mahadev to ponder somewhat on the questions of the Ashram as long as he was out of jail and so long as he was active in the Salt Satyagraha. Gandhiji once wrote to Narandas Gandhi :

"I know your attitude. So long as Mahadev is outside, you will not take upon yourself the burden of making a final decision, and you are right in doing so."³⁹

For another case Gandhiji takes the responsibility of the decision himself. In another letter to Narandas, Gandhiji wrote about another Ashramite :

"I think his unpunctuality and other shortcomings are such as we can tolerate. Being sincere, he does not want to make a false show. He refuses to do anything which is beyond his capacity or which does not appeal to him. But he has certainly the spirit of service in him. Since he is pure at heart, I think it is our duty to bear with his minor faults. But Mahadev is there now and he says that he will abide by Mahadev's decision. If Mahadev cannot settle the matter, in the last resort I will do so."⁴⁰

When they were in different jails, Gandhiji wrote from Yeravda to Durgaben in the Ashram. After giving some suggestions about Durgaben's health the whole letter was about Mahadev. For instance the letter written at five in the morning on 18th January 1931, has been written with a view to share with Mahadev his interest in the spinning-wheel, in the science of carding and in the *anasaktiyoga*.

"Chi. Durga,

I hope that your experiment of eating oranges is going on. I also suppose that you are taking enema regularly. The belching must stop. If you suffer from headaches, you may apply mud-packs to the head.

Tell Mahadev that I have not seen Hill's translation of the Gita. I have written to Kaka and asked him to suggest any changes that he may wish to in *Anasaktiyoga* and ask me any question he may want in regard to it. I shall be glad if he does. I send to Miraben the translation of one *bhajan* every week. If it is decided in future to publish them, Mahadev will certainly see them. Even otherwise, you may get the translations of all *bhajans* except the Bengali ones. It would be good if he improve his Urdu too. If Mahadev has not read what Mathuradas has written on the carding-bow, he should do so. It is necessary to make this science as exact, and introduce as much art in it, as possible. My love for the spinning-wheel increases as I take more and more interest in it. The spinning-wheel means all the processes through which cotton passes. God is no doubt the sole help of the poor, but the spinning-wheel is His hands and feet and the poor man or woman who holds it, holds God. We may not be able to live on simple fare as the poor do, but we ought to ply the spinning-wheel for their sake. And to ply the spinning wheel means to examine its infinite capacity and reveal it to the world. This is a study of no ordinary value. And to pursue it means to live the teaching of

the Gita. I need not say all this to Mahadev, but, at this hour of prayer, these deeper sentiments of my heart came out spontaneously as I think of him. Perhaps I would not be able to express them before the others in the same manner

Blessings from
Bapu"⁴¹

At times he wrote to seven-year old Babla :

"Shri Narayanrao,

Or should I address you as Bablo? You have drawn beautiful lines and curves indeed But, instead of scribbling such marks, learn to make every letter in a word as beautiful as a picture. I believe you must be full of fun now because Mahadev has returned. Don't send him back immediately.

Blessings from
Bapu"⁴²

FOOTNOTES

1. *M. D.'s Diary*-14, p. 1 (Guj.)
2. *Ibid.* p. 5
3. *Ibid.* p. 7
4. *Ibid.* p. 8
5. *Ibid.* p. 10
6. *Ibid.* p. 27
7. *CWMG* - 45, p. 145
8. *M. D.'s Diary* - 14, p. 31 (Guj.)
9. *Ibid.* p. 32 (Guj); *CWMG* - 45, p. 160
10. *Ibid.* pp. 48-49 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 45, pp. 180-81
11. *Ibid.* p. 50 (Guj.)
12. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-Patro* - 4, p. 17 (Guj.)
13. *CWMG* - 45, p. 244
14. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* Vol. II, pp. 45-46
15. *M. D.'s Diary* - 14, p. 84 selected (Guj.)
16. *Ibid.* pp. 88-89 as basis (Guj.)
17. *Ibid.* p. 89 (Guj.)
18. *Ibid.* pp. 90-91 (Guj.)
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.* p. 101
21. *Ibid.* p. 390
22. *Ibid.* pp. 263-264
23. Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. II, p. 57
24. *CWMG* - 45, p. 285, *M. D.'s Diary*-14, p. 120 (Guj.)
25. *M. D.'s Diary* - 14, pp. 130-31 (Guj.)
26. *Ibid.* p. 133 (Guj.)
27. *Ibid.* p. 147 (Guj.); *CWMG*-45, p. 305
28. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-Patro* - 4, pp. 18-19 (Guj.)

29. *M. D.'s Diary* - 14, pp. 311-12 (Guj.)
30. *Ibid.* p. 105 (Guj.)
31. *M. D.'s Diary* - 14, p. 512 (Guj.)
32. *Ibid.* p. 466 (Guj.)
33. *Ibid.* p. 541 (Guj.)
34. *Ibid.* p. 174 (Guj.)
35. *CWVG* - 45, pp. 333-34
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 347-48, *M. D.'s Diary* - 14, pp. 177 to 181 selected
37. *CWVG* - 44, p. 355
38. *Ibid.* p. 258
39. *Ibid.* p. 275
40. *Ibid.* p. 293
41. *CWVG* - 45, p. 99
42. *CWVG* - 44, p. 248

CHAPTER XXXI

IN ENGLAND WITH INEXHAUSTIBLE FAITH

There were some incidents in Gandhiji's life which appeared failure but, in fact they were responsible for raising his profile and, to some extent, the entire history of the nation to greater heights. His visit to England from September to December 1931 for the Second Round Table Conference was one such occasion, which brought apparent failure, but raised him to untold heights. It was Mahadev's difficult task to fuse Gandhiji's inner attitude with the external activities and to present it to the world clearly. And but for Mahadev's loyalty to Gandhiji, his patriotism, his extraordinary skilful activity and intelligence, his captivating nature and pleasant speech, it would not have been possible for Gandhiji, who was facing crooks and cheats, to keep his never-failing faith in his heart and to shine with so clear a humility at this critical juncture in history. Mahadev emerged in these days as a secretary taking notes; a journalist keeping the world informed about all the major and minor events. Every week Mahadev arranged interviews with people of various temperaments of a country about which he had no idea. He had to keep in view Gandhiji's ability and the interest of his country. Gandhiji was a statesman negotiating with members of the various parties in the British Parliament and with bureaucrats who functioned for the British Government. Mahadev moved about with Gandhiji as his constant companion through the poor neighbourhood of the East End to the Palace of the Emperor. They visited the school at Eton which produced Britain's Prime Ministers and to the University of Oxford. From the textile labourers who considered Gandhiji as the man who had snatched away their bread by leading a foreign cloth boycott movement, they moved to the residence of the Dean of Canterbury who considered Gandhiji as the man nearest to Jesus Christ. These activities helped Mahadev's personality to fully bloom during these four months.

Following his sense of duty Mahadev merged his personality into that of Gandhiji. And so we find the story of Mahadev and Gandhiji emerging as one whole. We will not follow their path only with a description of Gandhiji's activities but with a view to expressing Mahadev's intrinsic character, we will briefly describe the events.

Gandhiji was the only member who went as the genuine representative of the people of India to the Round Table Conference. Most of the others were like pawns in a game of chess, selected with care by the British Government, for their loyalty to represent real and imaginary groups in India. The Indian National Congress, after a lot of deliberation, sent Gandhiji as its sole representative to England. Millions of people in the country were all the time concentrating on what only Gandhiji was doing. And so Mahadev kept up the routine of keeping the people informed about the happening by sending weekly travelogues to *Navajivan* and *Young India*. The articles for *Navajivan* and *Young India* were not limited to these periodicals alone, other dailies in India were eager to publish weekly, these portions of the articles which could be of interest to the general readership. Thus Mahadev's weekly letters took the eager Indians also on a travel along with Gandhiji in their imaginations. Through his letters and articles Mahadev provided a glimpse into the process of Gandhiji's mind.

Let us take the travelogues first. The Indian people could now find out through *Navajivan* how Gandhiji, saluting the people giving him an emotional farewell from the terraces almost half a mile away, turned towards S S Rajputana. The travelogue also told how Gandhiji chose and transformed the most uncomfortable corner on the ship into an Ashram. And as it was difficult even to stand there because of the ship's rolling, there were less people to meet him and Gandhiji could get privacy for his work. When Gandhiji saw the luggage brought for himself and his colleagues, he was annoyed. Mahadev, openly described it with sheer contempt for his own weakness. With respect and wonder for Gandhiji, the real representative of the poor, Mahadev saw the mistake in carrying so many things. For Mahadev this was his first trip to the West. He had heard about the cold in England, and so Durgaben and other friends had insisted on his taking certain things. All unwanted luggage, except a long coat borrowed from Dr. Ansari, was sent back from Aden.

On reaching Aden, Mahadev described it as a city built on the lava of a volcano, 1660 miles in a straight line West of Bombay. One of the central parts of the city was called a crater. His recent experience of Gandhiji's minor volcanic eruption regarding the heap

of luggage, led him to compare a stay with Gandhiji to a residence on the crater of a volcano. But Mahadev was not satisfied with giving only the topographical details. He noted down that till 1839 there were only small fishermen's village in this place, and the population was about 600. Mahadev made his entire travelogue a broad-based medium for people's education, by making the Indian people participate in Gandhiji's travels as well as by letting them share his thoughts.

Mahadev's travelogues introduced all people, big and small, who met Gandhiji. Mahadev made a special note of the message of Nahas Pasha, the President of the main opposition party, the Wakfa Party of the time in Egypt, and of Madame Zagloul Pasha, wife of the leader who gave his life during the war of independence. During the voyage, many messages reached Gandhiji through the wireless. Mahadev specially mentioned the message of the Indians of Berbera and said: "For a while we wondered if Berbera was not another ship like the others that had flashed greetings to us. But I found at last, that Berbera is the principal town of British Somaliland on the South shore of the Gulf of Aden, which has been a protectorate since 1884." It seemed that Mahadev had made full use of the ship's library and specially the Atlas, during the voyage.

Mahadev recollected the history of the people on both the shores of the Gulf while passing by and also observed its geography. But the central theme in Mahadev's lyrical descriptions was the devotion shown by the visitors to Gandhiji and his overwhelming desire for freedom. Mahadev did not forget to record if Gandhiji gave a speech on board the ship on some day during morning or evening prayers. Mahadev comments on the occasion: "I wonder if Gandhiji knew when he said that life persists in the midst of destruction, that he was giving an epigram of which the converse already existed in the saying, 'In the midst of life we are in death'." The volcano of the Stromboli Island, seen from the ship became the motive for this question. But once again he turned to Gandhi inspired optimism and said "Quite conscious of the fact that the eruption may some day be more fearfully copious than usual and submerge them all in hot lava including pretty little villages nestle at the foot of the Volcano. Bumper crops are raised from the soil enriched by the lava which, whilst it destroys also creates. Truly in the midst of destruction life persists."

Thus giving a lively description of the entire voyage Mahadev takes us to the Port of Marseilles in France where journalists and photographers surrounded Gandhiji. Mahadev said that in every corner of the world, some things seem similar to our country. One of them is the institution of C I D and Police, the next are the industrial

cities and the third are the journalists. The representatives of the conservative papers of England believed only in jeering at Gandhiji and twisting whatever he said in some perverse manner, according to Mahadev on many occasions. Gandhiji scolded a journalist Mr. Slocombe, who had stayed at Sabarmati Ashram where he was nursed by the Ashramites during an illness. He had written untruths about Gandhiji. He drew upon his imagination and reported that Gandhiji prostrated himself before the Prince of Wales when the latter came to India. "Well, Mr. Slocombe, I should have expected you to know better. This does not do credit to your imagination even," said Gandhiji. "I would bend the knees before the poorest scavenger, the poorest untouchable in India, for having participated in crushing him for centuries, I would even take dust off his feet. But I would not prostrate myself, not even before the King, much less before the Prince of Wales for the simple reason that he represented insolent might."⁴

Mr. Slocombe must have been totally abashed. Journalist Mahadev brought to the notice of the readers, the declaration in the first issue of the newspaper named *Irish Press*, started a short time before by De Valera of Ireland. "We shall never consciously use this journal to mislead our friends or to misrepresent those who oppose us."⁵

Mahadev always did his best to raise the standard of the nation's values by presenting the readers, with words such as quoted above, supportive of truth, searched out from any corner of the world. As a journalist this was a service of rare value.

Mahadev exonerated the people of England by saying that it was not fair to judge the people from the newspapers. By describing the welcome afforded to Gandhiji at a couple of places, he indicated clearly that the British Rulers in India were not the representatives of the English people as a whole. Mahadev got many opportunities later on to describe these people. To prevent a grand welcome being given to Gandhiji, the British Government made a suggestion through Andrews to take him on his onward journey by car instead of by a train on his reaching the shores of England. Gandhiji understood the reason, and gladly accepted the suggestion. Gandhiji thus travelled to London by car from Folkstone. While thousands waited for him at London's Victoria Station, Gandhiji was going to lodge at the simple Kingsley Hall of London's East End, a poor locality, on the invitation of Miss Muriel Lester, a social worker who served the poor. And people went there with a warm welcome.

When in India, Gandhiji had received many suggestions regarding his place of lodging in London. The reason for his special selection of Muriel Lester's invitation in the East End was, firstly,

never to forget that he was going there as a representative of a poor country and secondly, to let the world know that too

Every morning he used to walk around in the adjacent localities, visit the people's homes, and make inquiries about their manner of living and the living conditions. People used to say, 'Oh ! He is just one of us !' A blind woman expressed a desire to meet him, so Gandhiji went to the hospital to be with her. When in the morning, at six, the hospital ward was swept and washed, all the patients and staff collected to see Gandhiji. Mahadev joyfully described how people specially got up early and lined up on the road to say 'good morning' to him, and also added a serious note. That though Gandhiji had declared that he was ready to meet his most scathing critic, Winston Churchill did not meet him. Churchill sent his clever son to Gandhiji, who (Churchill Junior) slipped in a question as to what would Gandhiji do if the present negotiations failed ? Gandhiji gave him a short but very effective answer, "Satyagraha," he said and added, "the Satyagrahis would be prepared this time to endure much more suffering than before."

The Columbia Gramophone-Company wanted to record Gandhiji's speech. Initially they were refused permission after great deliberations, but then later, after a second round of deliberations they were permitted to do so. Gandhiji went to the recording machine without any preparation, to the extent that he asked even when the machine was recording, 'Have to speak in this ?' and at the end, 'Is it now the end ?' Both these questions are also recorded.

Millions of Americans on the other side of the Atlantic heard Gandhiji's clear voice non-stop for half-an-hour, along with shouts of children playing on the roundabouts down below. He began by saying :

"In my opinion the Round Table Conference bears in it, consequences not only upon India but upon the whole world . . . If India is to perpetuate the glory of her ancient past, it can do so only when it attains freedom. The reason for the struggle having drawn the attention of the world lies in the fact that the means adopted are . . . truth and non-violence. . . . I, personally, would wait, if need be, for ages rather than seek to attain the country through bloody means. I feel in the innermost recesses of my heart . . . that the world is sick unto death of blood spilling. The world is seeking a way out, and I flatter myself with the belief that perhaps it will be the privilege of the ancient land of India to show the way out to the hungering world. I have, therefore, no hesitation whatsoever in inviting all the great nations of the earth, to give their hearty co-operation to India in her mighty struggle." He ended with the words "On

behalf of these semi-starved millions, I appeal to the world to come to the rescue of a people dying to regain its liberty."⁶

Now let us see how Mahadev portrayed Gandhiji's inner most thoughts. By the time he accompanied Gandhiji to the Round Table Conference, Mahadev was so engrossed in him that he could describe his thoughts as they were reflected in his own. Mahadev noted in the first article that although Gandhiji had agreed to go to England on Lord Irwin's persistent request, his attitude was more aptly described in the following couplet of our national poet Zaverchand Meghani quoted in more than one leading article of the newspaper :

"O Bapu, drink up this last cup of poison :
Do not now drop the handful, when you have
drunk an ocean !"

Mahadev, describing lightly some very bitter accusations against the British Government in a book, *A Word to Gandhi*, by a retired Brigadier General Crozier, wrote :

"It is to draw up a similar indictment that Gandhiji has come to England and he has been already at work; perhaps his manner will make his indictment the more irresistible. For every word that he utters comes deliberately out of the depth of his heart bearing the ring of truth and non-violence.

"That is the reason why the preliminary statement made by him in the Round Table Conference, though it was a claim for complete independence, did not offend. That is why when he talked of a rebellious India and of Lancashire which should expiate its sins against India in the House of Commons, not one of the M.P.s took it amiss, and that is why when he entered a firm protest against the dilatoriness of the proceedings of the Federal Structure Committee and against the packed nature of the British India delegation, no one took the *slightest exception*."⁷

Mahadev's forecasts emphasised Gandhiji's non-violent style :

"'England and India are bound by the silken cord of love', 'A willing partnership which could be ended at will and not one super-imposed by one nation on another' 'India cannot and will not remain a subject nation any longer', are phrases that will be long current here before we leave the shores of England."⁸

In the Round Table Conference, the British Government's main purpose was to bring together its selected representatives and then declare, 'How can we give freedom to India when there is no unity among the Indian people?' And Gandhiji's main strategy was to keep himself aloof from all matters at the Conference except those

concerned with principles, he took advantage of his visit to England to explain India's demand to every section of the British people. He used to get irritated at the dilatory tactics of the Government. And so Mahadev noted that Gandhiji did not leave any stone unturned in increasing the pace of the Conference. With reference to the British Administrators Mahadev reminded us of a sentence by their renowned statesman Chamberlain, "Now and then there comes a moment when courage is safer than prudence, when some great act of faith touching the hearts and stirring the emotions of men, achieve the miracle that no arts of statesmanship can compare."⁹

When the experts of the British Empire were all ready with figures, laws and intricate arguments, Gandhiji's resolve, resisting them all like an Abhimanyu, was very simple. "I will say in the rustic language of a villager that I am stupid. I am not talking about big things like Constitution. Knowledge is not my strength. I do not want to argue. Why do I need scholarship, when I want to weep about my miseries?"¹⁰ And the trouble was that neither the British Government, nor its chosen representatives, were accustomed to the talks of this rustic man:

On the way to England, Gandhiji had said, "I would go in for publicity with the permission of my opponents."¹¹ But Gandhiji's life itself was a publicity and truth was his greatest argument. Once when a British Diplomat, Lord Sankey, started arguing about the position of the native states, Gandhiji told him directly, "Is the real situation not known to you? Do you not know that the Conference has been filled up by 'Yes-men' of the Government? I do not give any importance to them or their questions. And you know what is the truth." Lord Sankey had no reply to this.¹²

Gandhiji had many talks with Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India. Gandhiji liked his frankness. And that's why he did not feel restrained whilst talking to him. He told him, "Please do not expect a language of hiding whatever I have in my mind. No doubt, I do desire a certificate that I have not spared any efforts in trying for a compromise." Sir Samuel Hoare, replied to this, "I would also wish to get such a certificate from you."¹³

(At another place) when Gandhiji felt that no progress was evident in the negotiations, he said, "You should find it easy to talk to me. But if you disregard my affectionate attempts, I shall go back, not with bitterness, but with a sense of some impurity in me which prevents me from having a place in your hearts."¹⁴

Thus Mahadev had given an excellent picture of goodness against statesmanship.

Only the Hindu-Muslim question was worrying Gandhiji. There was no nationalist Muslim among the Muslim representatives invited

for the Conference. And so those representatives were not interested in national problems. And in such matters they sided with the British Government. Gandhiji, therefore, tried to persuade the Muslim leaders by talking to them at separate sittings, but he did not succeed. In between, there was suggestion to hand over the Muslim question to arbitration (to the British?). But Gandhiji did not support the suggestion as many unpleasant things might be revealed about India.

Gandhiji continuously met the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, both in and outside the Conference. Once he told off Gandhiji: "You go on asking repeatedly, 'what will you give?' But why do you not tell me how much strength you have to take?" Gandhiji gave him a stiff reply: "Are you challenging me? Why should I have come here? I would have taken whatever I wanted by sitting right there in India. Let me return today. I shall take what I want."

The Prime Minister could give no answer. He had invited Gandhiji and Gandhiji's words had the strength of a great non-violent movement behind them. He started dithering. He said, "We both have our own difficulties." Gandhiji immediately shot back, "I have no difficulties, they are yours."¹⁵

Although at times Gandhiji was quite direct and blunt he never was discourteous. He never had any high hopes about the Conference. Once Ghanshyamdas Birla who had come to the Conference with him and gave him full support regarding Swaraj, asked him, "What are your hopes about this Conference?" Gandhiji replied, "To return empty-handed."¹⁶

Birla used to get furious at other Indian delegates who used vituperative language whilst referring to Gandhiji in some of the Committee meetings during the Conference. Gandhiji pacified him and said, "You please calm down! We are right. Aren't we? Why should we then worry about what others say?"¹⁷

Birla wrote in his memoirs, "Gandhiji lives in a whirlpool of disappointment with a cheerful countenance. Gandhiji said, 'It does not matter if we go empty handed, we would not go being shamed.' He never had any hope of getting anything from here, and now he is not even disappointed."¹⁸

Sir Samuel Hoare said very directly during the discussions, "We will never give you the army!" Gandhiji immediately said, "Bravo! People should be as plain speaking as this."

Next day Hoare asked Gandhiji, "Did I hurt you?" Gandhiji replied, "No, on the contrary, I am pleased. Because I have known that you are honest and you do not flatter."¹⁹

As days passed, it became clear that the British Government had no intention of giving anything worthwhile to India. Lord Irwin had come from India before the Conference had begun. He said, "It is not in my hands."

It was a fact that Gandhiji tried to win over the opposition, and for that extended his hand towards compromise more than once whilst talking to the statesmen and attending different Committee sittings of the Conference. But that did not mean that he could be cheated by anyone or that he would tolerate any disgrace to his country. Mahadev's pen had proved this by noting down Gandhiji's talks with every individual. As Gandhiji moved about among these groups, his bitterest opponent realised that he could not be overlooked; he could not be pushed aside by jokes, and he certainly could not be cheated. And so people like Lord Reading stood up whenever Gandhiji passed by their chair. The newspapers which were opposed to his ideas also asked for his articles with the assurance of printing them without any editing. And the statesmen also started to regard him as a clever and prudent man. Gandhi was not that simple as to believe that he would get what he wanted because of the sweet-talk at the Conference Table. Ghanshyamdas Birla once asked him after his talk with the Secretary of State for India, "Should I believe that your talks with him were hopeful?" Gandhiji immediately said, "No. I can only say that I had not hoped that he would talk to me with such an open mind."²⁰

As a matter of fact Gandhiji's activities during this visit to England for the Round Table Conference, took place outside the Conference Hall rather than inside it. Actually he returned empty-handed from this entire tour, and he knew that it would be so when he left India, but during these four months he educated the English people to a great extent. It could be said that he ploughed the earth during this visit and sowed the seeds of friendship for the peaceful transfer of power sixteen years later.

The chief medium of this instruction, of this course, was Gandhiji's life and his talks. Mahadev has noted down for us, the smallest details of that life and the nuances of those talks.

Gandhiji won the hearts of many people in England by his decision to stay at Kingsley Hall. Many people came and served him as volunteers. Newspapermen sent him free newspapers. Passers-by addressed him and greeted him as one of themselves. The behaviour of Gandhiji's entourage also won the approval of the neighbours.

Miraben's Indian dress initially invited curiosity and sarcastic comments but all were charmed by her devotion. Children asked Devdas Gandhi, questions about his father. Pyarelal lived almost like a twin brother to Mahadev. Only regarding Mahadev were there

complaints ' The landlady who was responsible for the household during Gandhiji's stay, complained to Andrews, "All others are all right, but this Mahadev does not maintain the rules. Keeps awake for a long time at night and quite a few other things " The complaint reached Mahadev. It also might have reached Gandhiji. But then the lady was told that no rule could be applied to Mahadev, because, all the time he was with Gandhiji. Moreover, he has to look after many other things. At times he would have to leave a meal, half-eaten, and at times, he would forget to eat. Reluctantly the lady accepted this indiscipline, but in a few days was charmed with Mahadev's nature. "He may not be very regular on time, but how much he looks after Gandhiji ! His language has natural politeness. And all the time he is ready to help not only Gandhi, but anyone I had not understood him at all !"

Mahadev noted that all children from the neighbourhood made friends with Gandhiji. Many children woke their parents up early with a desire to bid 'good morning' to Gandhiji when he went for his early morning walk. Gandhiji joked with many of them if he could find a minute or two. One father complained to him that his child hit him and then said, 'Now don't you hit back, for uncle Gandhi told us the other day never to hit back.'²¹ On his birthday the little children sent to 'Dear Uncle Gandhi' birthday presents in the shape of a toy dog and sweets. On his return from England these were the only extra luggage Gandhiji took with him.

Those people who could ever dream of meeting a renowned man, could get the opportunity of speaking a few sentences to Gandhiji because he elected to stay in that locality

The permanent residents of Kingsley Hall used to get together and have a variety entertainment once a week. Occasionally, Gandhiji also went as a spectator. Once, some one asked Gandhiji when he was watching the dancing couples, "Won't you join in our dance ?" Gandhiji immediately got up with his stick and said, "Of course, this stick will be my partner."

Thus Gandhiji was in constant contact with the people of England. He had taken up this gigantic task of explaining India's stand to England through unofficial interviews, lectures, question-answer sessions, conversations, and press interviews by going to the English people, answering their questions patiently, and shaking them out of their ignorance. The importance of this programme was greater than that of attending the sessions of the various Committees of the Round Table Conference. This would have been left undone had Mahadev not been there. He used to save hours of Gandhiji's time by avoiding some and shortening other interviews. What Gandhiji practised at the micro-level, Mahadev revealed it at macro-

level. As Verrier Elwin rightly said, "Mahadev's work was to personify Gandhi to millions." If we examine Mahadev's careful noting down of these various unofficial matters, we realise how skilfully he handled these situations. This was no ordinary journalist's reporting. It was not a commentary by a scholarly commentator. It was not even a praise of virtues by a devotee poet. It was a life's commentary, gilt with love, filled with faith, intellect and devotion.

Gandhiji had expressed a hope about the activity outside the Conference, "It may be possible that the seed that is being sown now may help to soften the British psychology and prevent man from becoming monster." To Gandhiji it was clear that England would benefit more than our country if inhuman massacres like Jallianwala Bagh were not repeated. Because if that happened, the English citizen would stop being an animal and become more human.

When the labour leaders of the Lancashire Mills invited Gandhiji to visit them, the British Government, upholder of law and order, got a shock. If any area had been detrimentally affected by the boycott of foreign cloth it was Lancashire and Manchester, and those who had lost their bread or whose business had broken down were bound to be angry. A hungry man can commit any sin! And so the Government was afraid of Gandhiji being physically attacked if he went to Lancashire. But Gandhiji considered himself to be a representative of labourers and desirous of befriending even his enemies, how could he refuse such an invitation? He immediately accepted the invitation. The Government strengthened the security arrangements. But Gandhiji, Mahadev and other colleagues mixed fearlessly with the crowds of textile labourers and accepted their greetings. They had discussions with their various representatives at different places. Gandhiji explained the essence of the movement. Gandhiji's sympathy with these workers was no less, but he could not forget the poor of India.

"I am pained at the unemployment here. But here there is no starvation or semi-starvation. In India we have both. . . You have three million unemployed, but we have nearly three hundred million unemployed and underemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is 70 shillings. Our average income is seven shillings and six pence a month. . . Pray tell me what am I to do with a fifth of human race living on the verge of starvation and devoid of all sense of self-respect. . . ."²²

Mahadev noted what a worker had said to Gandhiji. "I am one of the unemployed, but if I was in India, I would say the same thing that Mr. Gandhi is saying. What else could he have done?"²³

A small group of workers from the Midlands sent greetings to Gandhiji, and requested a return message after sending him greetings. Gandhiji replied, "I wish that they should take the greatest care in not being exploited by anyone."

In an article in the *Daily Mail*, a daily less sympathetic to Indian cause, Gandhiji explained that there was not much difference in the Conservative Party and the Labour Party with reference to the Indian question. He had to woo them equally. He said, "The truth is that they (Indians) are anxious to throw off the British yoke simply because they do not want to starve. And what else can happen when in a much more prosperous country like yours, your Prime Minister does not draw more than 50 times the average per capita income, whereas in India the Viceroy gets something like 5,000 times the average income of an Indian? And if the average income is so low, you can understand that the actual income in a vast number of cases must be nil."²⁴

When the Professor of Sanskrit of London University came to pay his respects to Gandhiji, Gandhiji shared a little humour with him. Mahadev took down this conversation, verbatim.

Gandhiji : Are you a great scholar? Tell me without any false modesty are you as great a scholar as Max Muller?

Professor : Well, yes, I have faith in my capacity and if I had not it, I would not dare to occupy Chair of Sanskrit. I know practically the whole of the Gita by heart, and have made a fairly deep study of the Upanishads.

He recited two verses of Upanishads and said, "My motto is, the Self cannot be realised by the weak."

"Well, we have much to teach you in pronunciation", said Gandhiji with a laugh."²⁵

Gandhiji was in excellent spirits while encouraging and talking to the professors and the students at the University of Oxford where they gave a lot of time to questions and answers. Mahadev describes some part of the session :

Q : What is the greatest obstacle in the way of Swarajya?

Gandhiji : It is the British Officers' unwillingness to part with power, and our incapacity to wrest power from unwilling hands.

Q : Why are you so uncharitable to those who drink?

Gandhiji : Because I am charitable to those who suffer from the effects of that curse.

Mrs. Eustace Miles : Do you ever suffer from nerves?

Gandhiji : Ask Mrs. Gandhi! She will tell you that I am on my best behaviour with the world, but not with her!

Mrs. Miles : My husband is on his best behaviour with me.

Gandhiji : Then I am sure Mr Miles has bribed you heavily.²⁶

Questions and answers at another place :

Q. : Do you think you are completely fit for independence ?

Gandhiji : If we are not, we will try to be. But the question of fitness does not arise, for the simple reason that those who have robbed us of independence have to render it back. Supposing you repented of your conduct, you can express your repentance only by leaving us alone.

Q : How far would you cut India off from the Empire ?

Gandhiji : From the Empire, entirely, from the British nation not at all.²⁷

A lot of eagerness was displayed about the negotiation going on at the Round Table Conference in the questions people asked at various places. Gandhiji did not miss a single opportunity of clarifying India's demand without endangering the confidentiality of the Conference. "I am not going to accept any interim arrangement in which we have to accept a position less than the best "

Q. How far is the British attitude towards the communal question an obstacle in your path ?

Gandhiji : Largely, or I shall say half and half.

At times he casually said things which were unpalatable to the British.

He said, "I cannot except anything less than complete control over the army " Or "We would not want an army which controls us. We cannot tolerate that."

Mahadev quoted a relevant statement of an Irish patriot, J. Delwin : "No country needs any study for accepting the right to independence That is the birthright", and then he quoted Gandhiji, "It is not only our birthright, but we have earned that right after passing through a lot of hardships."²⁸

Mahadev wrote describing his master's righteous indignation :

"Nothing provokes Gandhiji more than what he has often called the colossal ignorance about India in England." At a very influential gathering of Englishmen and Englishwomen he said : "Who is it that can say that you have conferred benefits on India ? We or you ? The toad beneath the harrow knows where the harrow pinches Such great leaders, Dadabhai Naoroji, Phirozeshah Mehta, Ranade, Gokhale who used to dote on you — do you know that they are all agreed in saying that you have on the whole done harm to India ? . . We are not skilled in administration. Well was it not Sir Henry Campbell

Bannerman who said that good government is no substitute for self-government? You, who are past masters in making mistakes, you who in the language of Lord Salisbury know the art of blundering through to success, will not give us the liberty of making mistakes?"²⁹

The visit to England for the Round Table Conference was undoubtedly one of the four or five most important occasions in Gandhiji's life when he was challenging the lion — the British Empire — in its own den Mahadev had accomplished the work of presenting this challenge as it was. This was the time for him to shine at his brightest. His best artistry of totally submerging his personality into that of Gandhiji's brilliant splendour expressed itself at the very best during this period.

Gandhiji hardly slept for three to four hours during those days. Mahadev got up a little before Gandhiji and slept after he did. Gandhiji would take a short nap of fifteen to twenty minutes whilst going from his place of residence to the place of meeting or interview. He had that control over sleep. Mahadev did not sleep. He would write notes in the car, and arrange Gandhiji's programme for interviews. In public meetings Gandhiji surprised the people by dozing off and yet wake up at the right moment and answer a question very aptly. Gandhiji observed silence on Monday and shook the whole of England by going out of London during week-ends. Mahadev wrote every week for *Young India*, and through those articles sent regularly, let India know about Gandhiji's activities. Every Wednesday night he started writing at 1 a.m. and continued till Thursday night till 1 a.m. with an hour off for personal needs. Gandhiji's condition was like that of Abhimanyu, struggling single-handed against a host of warriors. As his secretary and adviser, Mahadev, not only met all the people there, but kept contact through letters with many people in India. Here are some excerpts from a letter written by him to Pandit Jawaharlal :

"88, Knightsbridge,
London S. W. 1
October 23, 1931.

"My dear Jawaharlal

"The air mail day has arrived to find me in the same predicament as usual, there was just a little burst up in F. S. Committee when Bapu made a strong speech saying he was sick of the repetition of the phrase 'under the Crown' and that sort of thing. The Congress had long ceased to think in those terms and the sooner they got rid of that mentality the better. Lord Sankey congratulated Bapu on the candour and fearlessness and I think he was quite sincere. But I suppose

nothing can be expected until after the 27th. The talks with the Mussalmans are at a standstill and Bapu will not trouble to seek them unless they want him. Datta (Dr S. K.) told us a story which is sure to amuse you. He was dining with Jinnah the other day at an English friend's — Campbell Rhodes. Jinnah had been through his third bottle of champagne when the minorities question was being discussed. And Mr. Rhodes said, 'Why don't you give an agreed solution and compel the government to yield?' Jinnah under the sobering effects (?) of champagne replied, 'That is exactly where you are mistaken. It is impossible to have an agreed solution until we know what we are going to get and government are putting the cart before the horse.' Exactly the thing Bapu has been saying and the Mussalmans denying! (This, by the way, is an instance which would provide strong argument for the anti-prohibitionists.)

"Lord Irwin saw Bapu (or Bapu saw him) and was insistent that Bapu should not think of going unless he permitted him to go. The situation, he declares, is not desperate and will at any rate cease to be desperate as soon as the elections are over and he at any rate would try his best to make others see that most of the Congress demands are acceptable. If the Conservatives win the elections, (as it is quite on the cards) Irwin might be a member of the Cabinet. But Bapu is building nothing on these chances and is speaking out his mind anywhere and everywhere. The meeting in Chatham House was a great success. It is a Conservative stronghold, though Lothian presided. And though Yusuf Ali and Col. Gidney uttered much nonsense, Bapu was at his best and captured many a mind. G. P. Gooch the historian you know. He said it was the greatest meeting he had seen in Chatham House and that it had made on many, a tremendous impression. I wired the whole out through Sadanand. You must have seen it. I could not mention The Chatham House because their proceedings are supposed to be within closed doors.

"I saw a play at a "Private theatre"! You will be shocked? Well I did not know what a private theatre would be like. It was an unlicensed play. I should not have minded it a bit, but all scenes (about *ten*) were without exception bedroom scenes and monotonously vulgar! And yet I must confess the execution was superb! The thing however I liked was "Barretts of Wimpole Street" — beautiful in its conception and execution. The rendering, the stage effects and everything was so delicately chaste. Yes, I am deliberately using the word "Chaste". I can think of a "private theatre" being chaste. So I

went to the "Barretts" once again! The enclosed cutting will amuse you greatly. That's what the Secretaries of a poor people's representative are doing!"³⁰

From the above, many aspects of Mahadev's personality are displayed. His hard work, his keen intelligence and his devotion to Gandhiji are evident in a number of letters; but in this letter, his independent personality, his aesthetic sense and his sense of humour are revealed. Mahadev also could have said as firmly as Gandhiji that 'I would have died long back if I did not have a sense of humour.'³¹

To save Gandhiji's time Ghanshyamdas Birla offered to get him a stenographer who could take down notes in short-hand and type them out rapidly. Gandhiji said :

"At present there is no need for that. Where is the time to write or dictate? I approve of the articles put before me. Mahadev's language suits me. His writing is good. With Pyarelal it is not so. His handwriting is very bad and his language also is not satisfactory. He is knowledgeable. But his language and the style of writing do not maintain lucidity. He writes well when he concentrates on the subject. Otherwise there are shortcomings in his writings."

Pyarelal blossomed out after Mahadev's death. His writing became excellent after Gandhiji's death. That was his life's work. But during the Round Table Conference it fell to Mahadev's lot to be Gandhiji's writer, a writer of many letters and reporter and writer to *Young India* and *Navajivan*.

Over and above reporting, verbatim, Gandhiji's lectures, talks and question answer sessions, Mahadev used to give brief sketches of the people who came to meet Gandhiji and himself. The sketches he gave of Bishop Bell of Chichester, Cannon Campbell, C. P. Scott, former editor of *Manchester Guardian*, Retd. Brigadier General Cozier and the Dean of Canterbury, are brief but impressive. Gandhiji's interviews with Charlie Chaplin, Bernard Shaw and Madame Montessori are even today — sixty years after they took place — interesting. When Gandhiji was told that Mr. Chaplin would like to see him, he innocently asked who that distinguished person was. For several years Gandhiji's life had been such as to allow him no time to see or hear or read anything that did not come to him in the ordinary course of work he had cut out for himself. But Mahadev immediately told him as to who Chaplin was. As soon as he was told that Mr. Chaplin came from the people and lived for the people, and that he made millions laugh, he agreed to meet him. Mahadev wrote : "Mr. Chaplin struck me to be a genial unassuming gentleman and nothing like we find him on the film. But perhaps in

being a comedian lies his skill. Gandhiji had not heard of him, but he had evidently heard of Gandhiji's spinning-wheel and the very first question he asked was why Gandhiji was against machinery. The question delighted Gandhiji who explained to him in detail why the six months' unemployment of the whole peasant population of India made it important for him to restore them to their former subsidiary industry. 'Is it then only as regards cloth?' 'Precisely', said Gandhiji, 'In cloth and food every nation should be self-contained. We were self-contained and want to be that again. England with her large-scale production has to look for a market elsewhere. We call it exploitation. And an exploiting England is a danger to the world, but if that is so, how much more so would be an exploiting India, if she took to machinery and produced cloth many times in excess of her requirements?'

'So the question is confined only to India?' said Mr. Chaplin grasping the point quickly. 'But supposing you had in India the independence of Russia and you could find other work for your unemployed and ensure equitable wealth, you would not then despise machinery? You would subscribe to shorter hours of work and more leisure for the worker?'

" 'Certainly', said Gandhiji. The question has now been discussed with Gandhiji for the hundredth time, but I have not come across a lay foreigner who grasped the situation so quickly. The reason was perhaps his freedom from prejudice or prepossession and his sympathy." Thus, wrote Mahadev:

"This sympathy came out vividly when Sarojinidevi reminded him of his visit to an English prison. 'I can face a crowd of rich people', he said, 'but I cannot face these prisoners. But for the Grace of God, say I to myself, you would have been with them. One feels quite inferior to the occasion as one cannot do anything. What difference is there between us and them excepting that they are behind the bars and we are not? I am for a radical prison reform. Crime is a disease like any other and it should be treated not in prisons but in houses of corrections.'³²

An international class was being conducted in England by Madame Montessori, the famous children's teacher. She wrote when Gandhiji met her, 'Gandhi appears to me as a soul rather than a body.' Gandhiji explained his concept emphasising the point of education by saying that Madame Montessori respects the child's personality, and respecting a person, is non-violence.

Mr. George Bernard Shaw, possibly holding a position second only to Shakespeare in the field of English drama, had long been waiting to see Gandhiji and it was not without considerable

hesitation that he came. He sat with Gandhiji for close on an hour, interrogating him on a bewildering variety of topics — ethnographical, religious, social, political and economic — and his talk was illumined by his sparkling wit and sardonic humour 'I knew something about you and felt something in you of a kindred spirit. We belong to a very small community on earth,' said he. . . . He could not help asking a question about the R. T. C. "Does not the Round Table Conference try your patience?" He asked, and Gandhiji had to confess with sorrow 'It requires more than the patience of a man. The whole thing is a huge camouflage, and the harangues that we are treated to are meant only to mark time. Why not, I ask them, make a clean breast and announce your policy and let us make our choice? But it does not seem to be in the English political nature to do so. It must go by round about and tortuous ways.'³³

Mahadev's description of the visit to the Dean of Canterbury is an excellent word picture: "The pressmen are wondering", said the Dean "Why Mr. Gandhi should have come to Canterbury. . . . Well, I told them that, quite apart from politics, there is one great interest in common between Mr. Gandhi and me, and that is religion. It is just to have a talk about things spiritual that I was looking forward to a meeting with Mr. Gandhi and I am quite sure that we must meet again."

They had an intimate talk and then Gandhiji had to impose silence on himself at three o'clock, so as to be able to talk next day at the same hour when he had to assist in the deliberation of an important Committee "With you as witness Mr. Dean, I am going into silence," said Gandhiji. "And woe unto him who makes you speak", replied the Dean with equal humour. Gandhiji and his colleagues attended³⁴ the Church mass at the invitation of the Dean.

The Dean at the end of the service, offered special prayer asking of God to give India the ordered liberty that England was enjoying.

Mahadev's all-round intellect and his comprehensive imaginative powers helped him to be aware of the subjects in which the people he interviewed were proficient and more than that he befriended them. It is not necessary to say that just as

'A bird having flown from the ship,
Returns once again to the ship.'

Mahadev's descriptions and talks of all kinds ultimately ended with Gandhiji. The Dean said, "If he could think of a parallel of the Mahatma, it was St. Francis of Assisi." The Dean further added, "I told the pressmen the talks I had with Gandhiji. I do not know whether the press people will report all that I have said, I do not

mind so long they do not put in my mouth things I have not said. But I thought I must use the occasion by declaring to the British Public through them, that in case the Round Table Conference fails, I at any rate, will not tolerate a rule of the strong hand — the British public will not tolerate a repetition of Amritsar.”³⁵

Eton is more or less a stronghold of Conservatism and Imperialism. In the Eton Public School for the last four and a half centuries the sons of the upper middle class of England study. The Eton Public School has given a number of Prime Ministers to England. Many of the Prime Ministers as well as many of the Viceroy of India were trained at Eton. And so were many Generals of the English Army.

The elder among the boys of Eton, invited a rebel like Gandhiji and put him at the 500-year old mansion of the Head Master. It must not have been easy for the authorities to give the necessary permission.

Gandhiji invited them to ask him questions and have heart to heart chat. They had but one question, to ask and it looked though they were forbidden to move out of that charmed circle. “Mr Shaukat Ali gave us the Muslim case. Will you give us the Hindu Case?”, said the Chairman and when Gandhiji asked them to put questions, this very question was repeated by one of the boys. What a contrast to the poor East End boys who bombarded Gandhiji with questions about his home, his dress, his sandals and his language? But those poor folks are to be no Empire builders!

Gandhiji said,

“You occupy a big place in England. Some of you will become Prime Ministers and Generals in future and I am anxious to enter your hearts whilst your character is still being moulded and, whilst it is easy yet to enter your hearts, I should place before you certain facts as opposed to the false history traditionally imparted to you. Among high officials I find ignorance, meaning, not absence of knowledge but knowledge based on false data, and I want you to have true data before you, as I think of you, not as Empire builders, but as members of a nation which will have ceased exploiting other nations and become the guardian of the peace of the world, not by force of arms but by its moral strength. Well then, I tell you that there is nothing like a Hindu case, at least so far as I am concerned, for in the matter of my country's freedom I am no more a Hindu than you are. There is a Hindu case put up by the Hindu Mahasabha representatives who claim to represent the Hindu mind, but who in my opinion do not do so. They will have a national solution of the question, not because they are

nationalists but because it suits them. I call that destructive tactics, and am pleading with them that, representing as they do the great majority, they must step out and give to the smaller communities what they want and the atmosphere would be clear as if by magic. . . . This bugbear of communalism is confined largely to the cities which are not India, but which are the blotting sheets of London and other western cities, which consciously or unconsciously prey upon the villages and share with you in exploiting them by becoming the commission agents of England. This communal question is of no importance before the great question of Indian freedom of which the British Ministers are studiously fighting shy. They forget that they cannot go on for long with a discontented rebellious India — true, ours is a non-violent rebellion, but it is a rebellion none the less The moment the alien wedge is removed the divided communities are bound to unite. There is, therefore, no Hindu case, and if there is one, it must go by the board.

"If you will study history, study the much bigger question . . . How did millions of people make up their minds to adopt non-violence and how they adhered to it, so that when you grow to manhood you will have improved your heritage. It can be no pride to you that your nation is ruling over ours. No one chained a slave without chaining himself. And no nation kept another in subordination without herself turning into a subject nation. It is a most sinful connection, a most unnatural connection that is existing at present between England and India and I want you to bless our mission because we are naturally entitled to our freedom, which is our birthright and we are doubly entitled to it by virtue of the penance and suffering we have undergone. I want you, when you grow up, to make a unique contribution to the glory of your nation, by emancipating it from its sin of exploitation and thus contribute to the progress of mankind."³⁶

Gandhiji's mission was not to beg for India's rights from the British. He wanted to get England to wash its sin by giving freedom to India, and thereby increase its human dignity. His life's mission did not only require courage, it required immense courage.

The one argument in the Round Table Conference against giving freedom to India was that the demand for freedom should be made with one voice. The delegates expressed different opinions. Initially, Gandhiji gave a polite and a soft reply to this, but when he saw that this argument was used merely as an excuse to deny freedom, he stopped talking vaguely. He told all those in and out of the Round Table Conference clearly and specifically that a unified

demand for freedom could not be expected from the Conference of specially selected accomplices of the Government. "We have fought a battle of life and death. One of the choicest men of Britain's aristocracy tested us and we have not failed. As a result he opened the prison gates and requested the Congress to participate in the Round Table Conference. We have kept utmost patience during extended talks and negotiations. A Pact was signed by which the Congress accepted to be represented at the Round Table Conference. The Government has broken that Pact more often than adhered to it. After a lot of hesitation I agreed to come here because I wanted to keep my promise, given to that Englishman. I perceived after coming here that my calculations about the powers set against India and the Congress were wrong. But that has not perplexed me. I would have to prove on my return through suffering that the whole country demands it. I want to touch your hearts, not your bodies. If I do not succeed this time, I shall succeed next time."³⁷

Another one argument in the Conference was about giving separate electorates to the untouchables. The intention of the English was to delay giving freedom to India by creating constitutional complications arising out of the weaknesses in the Indian social set-up. Gandhiji was against separate electorates. The note presented by Mahadev about Gandhiji's arguments about this question is relevant as it is of interest today.

"If they had separate electorates their lives would be miserable in villages which are the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy. . . . I am certain that the question of separate electorates for the untouchables is a modern manufacture of the satanic Government. The only thing needed is to put them on the voters' list, and provide for fundamental rights for them in the Constitution. In case they are unjustly treated and their representative is deliberately excluded, they would have the right to Special Election Tribunals which would give them complete protection. . . . Separate electorate to the untouchables will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Mussalmans will never cease to be Mussalmans by having separate electorates. Do you want the untouchables to remain 'untouchables' for ever? Well, the separate electorates will perpetuate the stigma. What is needed is destruction of untouchability, and when you have done it, the bar sinister which has been imposed by an insolent 'superior' class upon an 'inferior' class will be destroyed."³⁸

Gandhiji's visit to the King George Vth was a special one among other visits during this period. From the point of view of the demand for the constitutional rights for freedom, this visit was

merely a formal visit. Because the King of England himself had no constitutional power, but psychologically it was rather important. Some believed that the visit of a man whom Churchill called 'half-naked fakir' to the King, added to the prestige of the Indian people. Gandhiji was accompanied only by Mahadev on this occasion. The newspapermen were making all sorts of guesses as to what clothes Gandhiji would wear when he visited the Emperor. But ultimately Gandhiji went in his loin-cloth and shawl covering the upper part of his body and Mahadev went with a *dhori*, long-coat and white Gandhi-cap. Mahadev put the visit in its proper perspective :

"Some will say the reception at Buckingham Palace was an important event. Well, with all respect to their Majesties, I cannot say No. Do these receptions mean anything ? Do Their Majesties *meet* people in the real sense of the term ? Do they transact any business ? Can they ? Or is it not more or less like a pantomime show ? And yet, some one will say, 'Gandhiji went there, why did he ? If it were so meaningless, why did he not abstain from it ? Shall I try to give the readers an inkling of his state of mind ? He described it at the Friends' meeting. 'I am here', he said, 'in an embarrassing position I have come as the guest of this nation and not as the elected representative of my own nation. I must, therefore, walk warily and I cannot tell you how warily I am walking Do you think I relished the Prime Minister's minatory speech in the Minorities' Committee ? I would have repudiated it there and then, but I sat mum. I came home and wrote a letter of gentle reproach And now, this week I am faced with a moral problem. I have an invitation to attend His Majesty's reception I am feeling so heart-sick and sore over the happenings in India that I have no heart in attending such functions, and if I had come in my own right I should not have hesitated to come to a decision. But, as I am a guest, I am hesitating. I can do nothing hastily. I have every moment to consider the morality of the thing and not the legality.'³⁹

"And it is the morality of the thing that decided him to go, and when he did so, he wrote courteous letter to Lord Chamberlain thanking him for the invitation and intimating to him that he and his companion who had also been invited would attend the reception in their usual dress. He usually excuses himself from all social functions, but he had to make an exception in favour of this as in some others, as he would do nothing which would be regarded in the nature of a discourtesy. He would refrain from doing anything that might be turned against him."³⁹

Mahadev was interested only in letting the world know about Gandhiji's attitude towards this visit. Ghanshyamdas Birla describes the event vividly :

"It was mainly the Emperor who spoke. Gandhiji was smiling away and spoke very little. The gist of the talk was as under :

"The Emperor said, 'I know you well. You had given me an address in South Africa from the Indian Community there when I visited that country as the Prince of Wales. You had given help in the Zulu War. Then later on you and your wife also helped greatly in the Great War. It is unfortunate that after that your attitude changed and you adopted non-co-operation. You know that it is imperative for the Government to preserve the Empire, — and so the governance has to go on.' Gandhiji said, 'Your Majesty does not have the time, nor do I wish to give a reply.' The Emperor said, 'Yes, but the Government has to go on.' Then he referred to the violent revolutionary activities in Bengal and said, 'This is a very bad thing, and nothing can be gained out of it.' Gandhiji said, 'I put in a lot of effort to stop that.' Then the Emperor asked, 'I have heard you love children a lot. Is it true?' Gandhiji said, 'I stay amongst the children.' "

Mr. Birla, commenting on it, wrote :

"Gandhiji's visit to the Emperor was the victory of nationalism. This is the first occasion when a partially clothed person, and Mahadev wearing a Gandhi-cap, met the Emperor."⁴⁰ Gandhiji joked about the visit with the journalists. One of them asked him, 'Why did you go to meet the Emperor with so few a clothes on?' Gandhiji said, 'With due apologies to the Emperor, because he alone had put on clothes enough for two people.' "

Gandhiji often used to joke with various types of people who came to visit him. As Miraben was returning from her walk one morning a man approached her and said : "I have been in the Navy for 21 years. I have served under your father, and my son-in-law supplies the goat's milk for Mr. Gandhi. Would he not kindly give me an autograph?" His appeal was not in vain. Gandhiji asked him to be ushered in. He came and narrated his autobiography, this time with the following additional remarks :

"I wish you and your mission real good luck, sir. I have had enough of this world. I served during the War, was thrown about from place to place — we were ordered to march to Salonica from Gallipoli with frozen feet and have passed through unspeakable horrors. I would sooner be in prison than serve during the next war.

It is a dreadful business, sir I should prefer to fight for your cause I wish you success in your mission" He had photographs of his daughter and son-in-law who supplied the milk.

"How many children have you?" Gandhiji asked him as he was preparing to go.

"Eight, Sir, four sons and four daughters."

"I have four sons," said Gandhiji — "so I can race with you half way." And the whole house roared with laughter.⁴¹

Now, we will cast a very brief glance at the part Gandhiji played at the Round Table Conference. Mahadev had noted down in detail about a dozen of his speeches in the Conference and in various sub-committees, which revealed to us Gandhiji's contribution to this historic occasion. This lean bodied man struggled alone against the entire Empire and its cronies. It is neither possible nor relevant to go into each speech. We need only say that through these notes Mahadev displayed his loyalty to Gandhiji by following the meaning of his words, and his loyalty to the people of his country, whom he kept informed about Gandhiji's every speech.

In his first speech before the Federal Structure Committee of the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji explained the basis of the Indian National Congress and more specifically the country's demand with reference to the Indian history. He said that they did not merely want political changes in the Constitution. They did not want to sever the connection with England. They wanted equal partnership which was not possible without getting complete independence such as England had.

The Government had appointed Gandhiji, deliberately, as if to harass him, as the Chairman of the Minorities' Committee of the Round Table Conference. In the very beginning of its first official session, with a confession of a failure at achieving unanimity through week-long private negotiations, he clarified that the reasons for the failure were latent in the formation of the Committee. And since it was not known what the Government was going to concede, how was it possible to know what would be lost because of mutual bickering? And so convening the Minorities' Committee meeting was untimely until such announcement was made. He advised suspending the Minorities' Committee for an indefinite period.

As no unanimous decision could be arrived at in the Minorities' Committee under Gandhiji's Chairmanship, representatives of some minorities drafted a unanimous statement of their own. Sir Hubert Carr thanked Gandhiji sarcastically and said, "Other minorities came together only because you failed." Gandhiji replied to it, "I will not deprive Sir Hubert Carr and his associates of the feeling of satisfaction that evidently actuates them, but, in my

opinion, what they have done is to sit by the carcass, and they have performed the laudable feat of dissecting that carcass."⁴²

Pointing to the plans of the Minorities, the Prime Minister went to the extent of saying that if the number of people in these Minorities were counted it came to about 46% of the country's population. That meant that the Prime Minister calculated as 11,50,00,000 people supporting these plans. Gandhiji said

"There is the coping stone to the structure and I am, surprised Mr. Prime Minister, that you allowed yourself to mention this as if it was an indisputable fact, namely, that the proposals may be taken as acceptable to well over one hundred and fifteen millions of people, or about 46 per cent of the population of India. You had a striking demonstration of the inaccuracy of this figure. You have had, on behalf of the women, a complete repudiation of special representation, and as they happen to be one-half of the population of India, this 46 per cent is somewhat reduced, but not only that," Gandhiji once again said emphatically, "the Congress may be a very insignificant organisation, but I have not hesitated to make the claim, and I am not ashamed to repeat the claim, that the Congress claims to represent 85 per cent of the population . . . of the whole of India . . . that the Congress by right of service claims to represent that population which is called the agricultural population of India, I would accept the challenge, if the Government were to issue the challenge, that we should have a referendum in India, and you would immediately find whether the Congress represents them or does not represent them. But I go a step further. At the present moment . . . if you were to examine the records of the prisons of India, you would find that the Congress represented and represents on its register a very large number of Mohammedans." In the same speech Gandhiji opposed separation of untouchables and said, " . . . I want to say with all emphasis that I can command that, if I was the only person to resist this thing, I would resist it with my life."⁴³

Discussing the subject of defence in another meeting of the Federal Structure Committee Gandhiji said :

"I think that a nation that has no control over her own defence forces and over her external policy, is hardly a responsible nation . . . This Army (in our country at present). . . I would say emphatically that the whole of this army should be disbanded, if it does not pass under my control. . . If you British Ministers and British people really wish well by India, if you will transfer power now to us, then regard this as a vital

condition, that the Army should pass under our control in its entirety."⁴⁴

It was only Gandhiji who could express himself in sharp language where the majority of the members did not dare to utter a word, in the Capital of the greatest Empire in the world and in the presence of all the diplomats and politicians of the Government; and addressing the English people bravely. And it was only Mahadev who could take down Gandhiji's words as swiftly as they were spoken, with a board and a thick note-book, sitting silently behind him. Mahadev's heart was like a mortar. Gandhiji's words mixed with Mahadev's devotion, as well as ground with his every austere action produced a wonderful chemical. This chemical made the matter arising from Gandhiji's words, more nourishing and healthy and Mahadev's pen made it so easily digestible that it was meant for all.

Gandhiji's last speech at the Round Table Conference was unparalleled. We cannot quote the whole speech and yet I cannot give up the desire to quote one paragraph, which is relevant for us, verbatim because of the combination of Mohan and Mahadev and also because it is profound in thought :

"One of your great statesmen was debating with me and he said, 'Honestly, I did not know that you meant this by Complete Independence' He ought to have known, but he did not know, and I shall tell you what he did not know when I said to him, 'I cannot be a partner in an Empire.' He said, 'Of course, that is logical' I said, 'But I want to become that. It is not as if I shall be if I am compelled to, but I want to become a partner of Great Britain. I want to become a partner with the English people; but I want to seek this partnership not merely for the benefit of India, and not merely for mutual benefits; I want to seek this partnership in order that the great weight that is crushing the world to atoms may be lifted from off its shoulders.'"⁴⁵

Gandhiji said in the last session of the Round Table Conference, full of enthusiasm, in spite of the fact that he was returning empty handed :

"Let me perform this pleasant task of giving my thanks to all — from Their Majesties down to the poorest man in the East End, where I have taken my habitation.

"In that settlement which represents the poor people of the East End of London I have become one of them. They have accepted me as a member, and as a favoured member of their family. It will be one of the richest treasures that I shall carry with me.

"Here, too, I have found nothing but courtesy and nothing but a genuine affection from all with whom I have come in touch. I have come in touch with so many Englishmen. It has been a priceless privilege to me. They have listened to what must have often appeared to them to be unpleasant, although it was true. Although I have often been obliged to say these things to them they have never shown the slightest impatience or irritation. It is impossible for me to forget these things. No matter what befalls me, no matter what the fortunes may be of this Round Table Conference, one thing I shall certainly carry with me — that is, that from high to low I have found nothing but utmost courtesy and utmost affection. I consider that it was well worth my paying this visit to England in order to find this human affection. It has enhanced, it has deepened my irrepressible faith in human nature that although Englishmen and Englishwomen have been fed upon the lies so often that I see disfiguring your press, that although in Lancashire the Lancashire people had perhaps some reason for becoming irritated against me, I found no irritation, no resentment even in the operatives. The operatives, men and women, hugged me. They treated me as one of their own. I shall never forget that.

"I am carrying with me thousands upon thousands of English friendships. I do not know them, but I read that affection in their eyes as early in the morning I walk through your streets. All this hospitality, all this kindness will never be effaced from my memory no matter what befalls my unhappy land. I thank you for your forbearance."⁴⁶

Mahadev went to the market with Agatha Harrison to buy something for Babla. She took him to the famous Harrod Stores. Perceiving the ostentation of the shop Mahadev said, "How can I buy such toys for my son when other children do not get enough to eat?" Finally he bought a six-penny worth of colour box and a drawing-book from a cheaper shop.

FOOTNOTES

1. Editors C. Rajagopalachari & J. C. Kumarappa, *The Nation's Voice*, p. 101
2. Ibid p. 111
3. Ibid
4. Ibid, pp. 115-16
5. Ibid, p. 116
6. *CWMG* - 48, pp. 8-9
7. Editors C. Rajagopalachari & J. C. Kumarappa, *The Nation's Voice*, p. 120

8. Ibid
9. Ibid p. 121
10. G. D. Birla, *Gandhiji Sathe Golmejiman*, pp. 12-13 selected
11. Ibid. p. 13
12. Ibid p. 28
13. Ibid.
14. Editors C. Rajagopalachari & J. C. Kumarappa, *The Nation's Voice*, p. 130 slight alteration
15. G. D. Birla, *Gandhiji Sathe Golmejiman*, pp. 39-40 selected
16. Ibid. p. 51
17. Ibid. p. 53
18. Ibid p. 55
19. Ibid. p. 56
20. Ibid. p. 28
21. Editors C. Rajagopalachari & J. C. Kumarappa, *The Nation's Voice*, p. 220
22. Ibid. pp. 208 to 212 selected
23. Ibid. 213
24. Ibid. p. 122
25. Ibid. pp. 140-41
26. Ibid. pp. 156-57
27. Ibid. pp. 191-92
28. Ibid. pp. 191-92-93
29. Ibid. p. 168
30. From the Correspondence, Nehru Museum & Library, N. Delhi
31. G. D. Birla, *Gandhiji Sathe Golmejiman*, p. 25
32. Editors C. Rajagopalachari & J. C. Kumarappa, *The Nation's Voice*, pp. 128-29 selected
33. Ibid. p. 158
34. Ibid. p. 214
35. Ibid. pp. 217-18 selected
36. Ibid. pp. 180 to 183 selected
37. Ibid. pp. 187-88 selected
38. Ibid. pp. 188-89 selected
39. Ibid. pp. 158-59
40. G. D. Birla, *Gandhiji Sathe Golmejiman*, pp. 68-69
41. Editors : C. Rajagopalachari & J. C. Kumarappa, *The Nation's Voice*, p. 128
42. Ibid. p. 38
43. *CWMG* - 48, pp. 295 to 298 selected
44. Ibid. pp. 304 to 306 selected
45. Ibid. p. 362
46. Ibid. pp. 367-68

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN EAST AND WEST MEET

"Last but not the least was my pilgrimage to Romain Rolland. . . . Could I have left India just to visit him . . . I would have undertaken the voyage." This sentence was written by Gandhiji two days prior to his reaching Bombay after his European tour in an article, "What Did I Bring from Europe?" People in those days knew Romain Rolland as a scholar, musician and philosopher. But in the article Gandhiji has used the word 'saint' for him. For Mahadev it was a unique opportunity to witness the meeting of these two ascetic friends, one from the East and the other from the West. Gandhiji decided to go via Switzerland, though it meant delay, in reaching India, in spite of Vallabhbhai's cable for them to return as soon as the Conference was over, as the situation in India was deteriorating. This had added to the work of arranging for suitable train and boat tickets; selecting hosts from a number of people anxious for the honour and writing to them. Mahadev, amongst his entourage, was considered most suitable for these transactions. Miraben knew Romain Rolland the most. But Mahadev was as enthusiastic about this trip as Miraben. He was meeting Romain Rolland for the first time and so was Gandhiji; but these three had some spiritual connection for a long time.

Gandhiji has been mentioned for the first time in Romain Rolland's diary as early as in 1920.

In 1921 Rolland wrote,

"I see in Gandhi something quite different from an internationalist . . . he is a nationalist, but of the greatest, the loftiest kind, a kind which should be model for all the petty, base, or even criminal nationalisms of Europe. I see in him the highest and purest type of spiritualized nationalism, a type which is unique today and which could well be offered as a model to the egoistic and materialized nationalisms of present day Europe."

In 1922 Romain Rolland told his friend Kalidas Nag,

"My sister and I are reading — or rather have just finished — the 700 or 800 pages Gandhi has published. Some of the things he says are immortal, others are highly perishable and threaten the rest of the system; above all this medieval mistrust of modern science. . . . Nag sends us a copy of a letter written to him by Tagore in May 1922: it harmonises with my thought."

In 1923 Rolland wrote to Nag that he would write two articles as a Foreword to the published articles by Gandhiji.

"I can improve my work for the volume of Gandhiji's translated writings to which it is later to form the introduction. I even hope to bring it out again, a little later on, as a small volume in my collections of 'Heroic Lives' I know no hero, more pure, more straightforward or more truthful. . . . Europe has none approaching him — not by a long way."

In a letter in March 1923, Rolland compares Gandhi and Ravindranath to St. Paul and Plato C. F. Andrews met him the same year and talked in depth about these two great men.

In the same year Rolland's book on Gandhiji was ready. It was published in 1924. Rolland sent a message of sympathy to Gandhiji, because of his sickness, through Ganeshan.

On 17th February 1924 Romain Rolland and Paul Richard wrote to Gandhiji jointly :

"We join together to send you our message of love and admiration.

"There you are, free again, after the glorious shade of the jail, in the sunshine of the battlefield. May India be ready this time. And may Europe also hear your voice in her wilderness ! Yours is the love of India and the service of humanity.

Paul Richard, Romain Rolland."²

Dr. Kalidas Nag came to meet Gandhiji with Rolland's message in November 1924. He informed him that Rolland's book on Gandhiji was translated in all the European languages. In Russian, a well-known scholar like Maxim Gorky, translated it. Mahadev wrote, "But today France has no value for a great man like Romain Rolland, no one there is ready to accept his message of non-violence and peace. Today he is a recluse. Rolland was very keen to visit India. He was ready to come in spite of indifferent health and financial difficulties. But his 88 years old father could not join him and Rolland could not leave him and come."

Romain Rolland was very unhappy that due to his indifferent health he could not come to welcome Gandhiji when he disembarked at Marseilles in France when he came through Europe for the Round

Table Conference. But he sent a very warm message through his sister. When in England Mahadev asked the Bishop of Chichester to name the prominent pacifists, he unhesitatingly gave two names of Albert Schweitzer and Romain Rolland. And Gandhiji had repeatedly mentioned Rolland in England

Mahadev gives a long introduction before describing Gandhiji's visit to Romain Rolland in a small village in Switzerland named Villeneuve on 6th December 1931 when both of them went there together.

Gandhiji's contact with Romain Rolland increased from the time when Mirabehn came to the Ashram, although he had written the book on Gandhiji about two or three years before her arrival. She was drawn towards Romain Rolland, the devotee and biographer of the revolutionary poet and musician Beethoven, from Germany. And later on she was drawn towards Gandhiji through Romain Rolland's book about him. In this way Mirabehn became the instrument of the unbreakable tie between Romain Rolland and Gandhiji.

Romain Rolland was keenly desirous of meeting Gandhiji. Twice, a trip to Europe was planned and cancelled, which pained both of them, but both waited with patience; during the intervening period Romain Rolland kept Gandhiji informed about the actual situation in Europe and added to Gandhiji's desire to talk to him. For the last two years he was not keeping well, and if this time Gandhiji had to return without seeing him, Gandhiji would never have forgiven himself. It appeared that this trip had been ordained a long time ago.

Rolland had a volcano burning in his heart and was as if hoping to extinguish it through a soothing talk with Gandhiji.

A number of pages were filled by Mahadev with the description of the meeting of these two friends, joined by a spiritual kinship. Because, Mahadev not only saw the analysis of the current situation in Europe from the point of view of pacifism but also felt the indirect presence of Tolstoy, Beethoven, Ramakrishna and Ravindranath. Moreover, the peace of the place and its extreme beauty also attracted both Gandhiji and Mahadev. Mahadev wrote about Romain Rolland :

"He had invited the displeasure of the French Government in the last war, he was terribly harassed, for some time he continued with propaganda against war in Geneva, and then settled down in a small village named Villeneuve situated on a beautiful lake in Geneva, surrounded by a number of mountains. He is full of affection for truth, goodness and beauty, wherever it is found in the world, but his nature is that of a simple, guileless, Frenchman submerged in his own

atmosphere. His library is full of German, French and Russian books. His love for truth and non-violence made him Tolstoy's student, Gandhiji's worshipper and now got him interested in Ramkrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda."³

Romain Rolland was the first to rush into conversation. He wanted to warn Gandhiji and inform him of the prevailing situation in Europe. Gandhiji was going to return to India from Switzerland via Italy. Mussolini's authoritarianism had by then fully developed in Italy and care had to be taken that Gandhiji's visit was not misused as Mussolini had done with Rabindranath Tagore's visit. Moreover, there was also a desire that Gandhiji should grasp the good elements in Communism.

The following contains more or less, only Rolland's talk, with slight changes in words to relate the meaning clearly :

"After the World War, the French President, Clemenceau, signed a Peace Treaty, which could not last. The American President, talked about humanitarianism without any basis. Both were defeated. I thought that my country was economically, socially and ethically honest, but I saw that the latest force behind politics was money. The intellectuals did not have decisiveness and faith, so the efforts to stop those forces proved futile. The required power of resistance is not there in the democracies of Europe and America. Their call was for the liberation of newspapers, but newspapers are run by money. So they are in the hands of the rich. The Christian non-resisters can stop all this, but the question is not fighting against war but against sucking people dry. Russia had risen in 1917. We feel that if money-power wins against Russia, it will be the end of hope for the European countries. Lenin was above personal enmity, but Stalin does not have that ethical broadmindedness.

"There is no moral strength of character in the middle classes. How nice it would have been if you could have met Lenin ? His devotion to truth was equal to yours but your paths were different. You have read Ruskin's *Unto This Last* but have not read Marx's *Das Kapital*. There is stupid propaganda to malign you. How nice it would have been, had I been twenty years younger ? I would have fought against Europe then.

About Mussolini Rolland said :

"He has an intricate personality. He moves about supporting a person more than a cause. He is as cowardly as he is courageous. When Tagore went to meet Mussolini he said, 'I also believe in peace and non-violence' and the Italian newspapers printed Tagore's statement in a twisted manner. When Tagore sent us the corrections no paper were ready to

print it. The Pope favours peace as an ideal. You must meet him. But if you go to meet him and do not meet Mussolini, he would consider it a grave offence. Great statesmen are connected with great crimes."⁴

Mahadev wrote "Thus on the very first day, opening up his heart, pushing back his chair, Rolland took Gandhiji's hands in his own hands and keenly gazed at him like a lover, gazing at a long-lost beloved."⁵

Romain Rolland's sister Madeline acted as the interpreter. She said, "We never thought that such a day will come. We often feared that would we have to leave this world without seeing you?"⁶

Gandhiji told Rolland that he wanted to meet Mussolini to talk about peace. He also wanted to meet the Pope. By doing so he hoped to win the confidence of the Catholics in India.

Rolland warned him, "Be careful that you do not speak anything that may mean that you accept Mussolini's authority. You draft your statements for publication. They would not publish them in Italy. You must keep an American reporter with you."

Gandhiji said, "I would not speak on subject with which I am not concerned."

Rolland expressed the fear that Gandhiji may not follow if they speak against him.

Gandhiji : I would do my duty and be indifferent towards the results.

Rolland : It is your duty to give your message to the poor.

Gandhiji : I feel that it is impossible for any man to have such careful and definite vigilance.

Rolland repeatedly insisted on his keeping someone with him when Gandhiji said :

"The immediate result would be that the Italian newspapers would present me wrongly. But a good word spoken or good deed done has an effect even after a long time. If we are sure that I would not be trapped by any temptation, we must take this risk."⁷

Gandhiji said in the next day's discussion :

"When you said that non-violence can succeed in India but not in Europe, I thought it was a very serious question. I do not find any difficulty. The simple reason being that non-violence can be applied universally. That does not mean that I have the capacity of giving the message of non-violence to Europe — until and unless it comes through India."⁸

Thus here we see a peculiar paradox, inasmuch as the 'international' figure of Romain Rolland considered non-violence possible in India, but not in Europe, while Gandhi who is a

'nationalist' according to him considered non-violence as a universal force !

Romain Rolland wrote in his diary of 9th December :

"In the evening I have another conversation, short but pleasant, with Gandhi's first secretary, Mahadev Desai, a handsome Indian, 35 to 40, tall, well built, with an intelligent face. My sister has had longer conversations with him, and I know that he left his career as a lawyer to devote himself entirely to Gandhiji which has brought him a never-failing happiness. But I also know from Mira, and he tells me himself this evening, that my writings and thought have their place in his life. He was delighted when Mira came to the Ashram, as they could talk together about me, and Desai asked Mira to teach him French, so that he could read my words in the original. But when Gandhi heard about it he reproached both of them severely, saying, quite rightly, that at a time like the present they should not be reading works of art, but devoting themselves entirely to the cause of India. This did not stop Desai from continuing his studies, as he tells me he now knows enough French to realise how often the English translations are unfaithful to my text; he asks me to give him *Jean Christophe* in French, as well as my *Vie de Tolstoi*; he hopes that he will soon be sent to prison, back in India, which will give him time to read my books. The emotion in his eyes and his Indian gesture of devotion tell me of the affectionate gratitude he feels towards me. He and Pyarelal have been longing for this meeting for years; twice already it should have happened and it fell through; he says that it now feels like a dream. Everyone works to exhaustion in Gandhi's circle. When the Master himself has gone to bed, Desai and Pyarelal very often stay up late at night making fair copies of notes taken during the day. Desai has the job of editing them for publication in *Young India*."

Pierre Ceresol, the founder of 'Service Civil International' met Gandhiji one early morning at Romain Rolland's place. He was a man with a very pure heart. The meeting with him became one of totally like minded people. Some religious groups had met Gandhiji at a couple of meetings in Switzerland. Excellent question-answer sessions with them had taken place. In a meeting at Lausanne Gandhiji had said, "I would like to say 'Truth is God' instead of 'God is Truth'." Most probably that meeting was organised by Pierre Ceresol and his friends for the conscientious objectors to conscription.

Gandhiji said in a reply to a question :

"I would feel sorry if I know that you have given up the message of the Sermon on the Mount. Nothing would please me more than the knowledge that the Christians of Europe know how to live according to that message of Jesus. . . . You cannot save yourself, if you are not ready to sacrifice yourself."¹¹

Mahadev made a note :

"Piere Ceresol danced with joy at hearing this reply. In that answer he got Gandhiji's blessing for his own work. He told a friend, 'Till now we were doubtful, we had not got an unshakable support to tie ourselves down. Now we are not afraid of going astray as we are tied down to this support.' "¹²

A couple of paragraphs written by Mahadev before leaving Switzerland gives a picture of his experiences there in a few words :

"I must definitely say that we had very valuable experience during our days in Switzerland. All people from far and near had brought presents. Some brought flowers and sang songs. The people who came last were cowherds who enthusiastically sang their songs about their cows. Hundreds of children collected where Gandhiji had put up and sang sweet music. A friend came daily with his violin when Gandhiji took his breakfast, and played on it. This morning when we were leaving for Geneva a simple, rustic woman came and gave me an envelope. I thought it was a farewell note. When I opened it in the late evening I found a coin of five francs and a note. In the note it was written, 'From a Swiss woman labourer, a small gift for a very poor Indian woman.' There was another typed letter — it was obvious that it was from a woman who was in touch with Gandhiji's activities. There was a currency note of twenty francs, and a note in which was written, 'I must understand the hardships of the Indians. I know how much burden you are carrying, and still I cannot desist from sincerely requesting you to pray for Switzerland and distressed Europe.'

"Thus the days between 6th to 11th at Villeneuve were memorable days. Monseigneur Romain Rolland's unlimited love for Bapu and his child-like innocence reminded us of Boro Dada. His generosity was also endless. But he had extraordinary suspicion — suspicion aroused by nervousness. He made suggestions. (He said) '(You) should not meet Mussolini, should not take facilities offered by him.' 'If you go to meet him, be very careful.' 'Keep your own men with you, keep a note of your talks with him', and gave such suggestions. Bapu said, 'It is not in my nature to take so many precautions. And we cannot refuse the facilities he has offered.' "¹³

After Gandhiji went to Italy Romain Rolland wrote with pleasure about his (Gandhiji's) visit to many friends. In those letters Gandhiji's colleagues are also invariably mentioned. Two or three references to Mahadev have been given below :

On 24th December, to French Friend Lucien Roth :

"Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal, the two secretaries and disciples who were with him, are admirable young men, full of talent and born artists, but they sacrificed everything to him and they regret nothing, delighting in the extraordinary atmosphere of purity and heroism which radiates from the man and his Ashram."¹⁴

On 25th December, to Lucien Price in U.S.A. :

"With him were Mira (Miss Slade), proud of features and with the august bearing of a Demeter, and three Indians, a young son of Gandhi called Devdas, with a round and happy face (a nice lad, not fully aware of the great name he bears), and two secretaries and disciples — young men of rare qualities of mind and heart — Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal."¹⁵

29th January 1932 to Esther Marchand (France) :

"The two secretaries, Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal (two very artistic and refined men)."¹⁶

The stay in Italy was cutshort by two days as two extra days had been spent in Switzerland. The Government had reserved a first class compartment for Gandhiji from Milan. A friend insisted that Gandhiji must visit Rome and so it was decided to board the boat at Brindisi, going there via Rome instead of via Venice.

The group could not stop at Milan owing to shrotage of time. Two Experts on Eastern philosophy met Gandhiji at the station and presented two books to him.

"In one book, there was the gist of Upanishad, beautifully printed in Roman and Devnagari alphabets. It was in the form of a memorial to our culture — some excellent selections, — verses from the book (Upanishads) and their commentaries. The other book was named *Bhaktiyog*. The twelfth discourse of Bhagwad Gita was printed in it with affectionate care and in a beautifully artistic manner in exactly the same way as has been done by the Christians in the Sermon on the Mount or the Hound of Heaven. Every verse of the 12th discourse has been printed separately along with its paraphrase and commentary, the scholarly knowledge and the selection of the most beautiful discourse of the Gita — one which could be called the discourse of self-sacrifice leading the lowliest man to God, — show the excellent taste which was indeed admirable. . . ."¹⁷

In Rome Gandhiji had asked for an audience with the Pope Mahadev wrote "The Pope refused the audience, with the excuse that he does not see anybody on Sunday and the rest of the morning time was occupied!"¹⁸

Gandhiji had met Madame Montessori in London and it was a very cordial meeting on both sides. He and his party visited one of the Montessori schools in Rome.

One of Tolstoy's daughters, Signora Abbortina had married an Italian. She specially came to meet Gandhiji. She was, once, a friend of Romain Rolland. Gandhiji tried to rejuvenate that weakening friendship. The visit was a short one, but Mahadev did feel that it would have been better had it been a longer one.

There had been comparatively less publicity for Gandhiji's visit to Mussolini. If that visit had been to the liking of the greatest dictator of the period, all the news media of Italy would have given it a great publicity and all the anti Fascist countries would have opposed it on one count or another. Its details are all buried in Mahadev's diaries. A dictator, holding power by violent means, one who had done quite a lot for his people, but by strength of colonialism and military might, was meeting a non-violent patriot who had challenged the biggest Empire. Romain Rolland had warned Gandhiji, only a few days ago regarding his talk with Mussolini, but Gandhiji had gone to meet Mussolini without any agenda, with an open mind. Mussolini might have been interested in him perhaps because he was an opponent of the British Empire. But this Commander, the propagator of the philosophy of violence, must have had some uneasiness in talking publicly to this practitioner of non-violence. Mahadev had noted down the whole visit, including the atmosphere at that time, Mussolini's expressions and Gandhiji's reactions.

"We were taken to a large room, through many rooms and one full of ornaments. Mussolini came to receive us at the door. He shook hands with all of us, there were two chairs near his table. He made Bapu sit on one and Mira sat on the other. General Morris and myself kept standing. We were made to stand because he did not even show courtesy by indicating the unavailability of a chair.

"Slowly he went on asking short questions and his small black pupils of the eyes darted here and there whilst he was asking the questions. It was a huge hall - almost the whole without a carpet, with a long table on a small carpet - a table on which there were an inkpot, paper cutter, penknife, orange-juice in a small glass, four red and blue pencils in a cup, a statue of Victory in front of his eyes, a lion at one end of the

table, and a chandelier with a hundred candles hanging from the ceiling !

'Do you like Italy ?'

Bapu : 'I like your beautiful country.'

'Did you meet the Pope ?'

Bapu : 'He could not give me an audience. He said, he does not meet anyone on Sunday, and this morning he had a busy schedule.'

Mussolini made a face, blinked his eyes as if he knew the Pope's lie. And turned to another question.

'Has the Round Table Conference ended ?'

'Yes, though some work does remain; and it has been declared that it has been suspended. A Working Committee has been appointed, which will continue the work.'

'Did you get anything ?'

'No — because I did not hope to get anything.'

A cunning and contemptuous smile lighted his eyes

'How is the economic condition of India ?'

'Bad, the reason being that we produce more than our needs; it is not as bad as that of other countries; and if there was not the daily exploitation and if 80% of the income was not wasted as an expense for the army, we would have been happy.'

He (Mussolini) shook his head

'What is your programme ?'

'We may have to start a civil disobedience movement.'

'What about the Hindu-Muslim question ?'

'We would stick to it and somehow see it through. In the last analysis we have some excellent representatives of Islam, who are working for the Congress. You would not get any one better than Dr. Ansari in the world. He is a descendent of the Ansari family whose members helped the Prophet Mohammad when he had to leave Mecca.'

'Do you think you will unite ?'

'I have not a bit of a doubt about it.'

'Do you want complete independence for India ?'

He blinked the eyes when he said 'complete'.

'Yes, but that does not preclude equal partnership with Britain. Today England is exploiting India. When she stops doing that, I would not mind partnership.'

'Are you thinking of a Republic State ?'

'Yes, I want a democratic system.'

'Have you thought of one head for all states ?'

'No, I am thinking of a President elected from the groups of every interest.'

'Do you think Communism will succeed in India?'

'No, I do not think it will.'

'That is my opinion too.'

'How many times you have visited England? For how many months?'

He corrected his English after the second sentence.

Bapu said two months, Mira said three. So he looked at Mira and said:

'How are the conditions in England?'

Bapu: 'Bad. Japan and yourself are her successful competitors and so they cannot overcome the resultant economic condition. You specially, your artificial silk goods are mainly responsible for it.'

Tiny, black pupils rejoiced in self-satisfaction.

'What do you think of conditions in Europe?'

'Now you have asked me the question for which I was waiting for a long while. Since long, Europe cannot go on as it is today — until and unless the entire foundation of its economic life is changed, and until there is a fundamental change in its values. Whatever steps it may take to maintain the present structure — it will not be able to maintain it.'

'Can there be no meeting point between East and West?'

'Why not? The West has been exploiting the East, but the moment it stops exploiting the East, co-operation can become possible from then on.'

He once again said, 'I also believe the same.'

He got up and went to see off Bapu. He told Bapu, 'I hope that you have a good impression about Italy and Rome.'

Bapu: 'Oh yes! It is a fine country, and Rome is a beautiful city. I am thankful to you for reserving a first class compartment for me.'

He said, 'Oh! Please think nothing of it.'

Then Bapu said, 'I would have liked to see some of your institutions, but all that cannot be accomplished in one day.'

Photographers were waiting for us as soon as we left the hall. They took a photograph of Bapu, Mira, General and myself.

Whilst returning Bapu said, 'Did you notice his cat-like eyes?'

I said, 'They were shining just like a cat's eyes. They were full of hatred and enmity. Evil was certainly present.'

Even after coming home Bapu described them as cat's eyes.

When I said, 'The devil's eyes cannot be better than this,' Bapu did not object.

When everyone left, Bapu said, 'If you all were not there, he might have talked more. You all know don't you that he may have considered Mira a spy?'

I explained to Bapu how Mira could come, so Bapu said, 'She is foolish.'"¹⁹

In Rome, because the programme had been hastily arranged, there was not that big a crowd of visitors as we had in Paris and Geneva. Taking advantage of the free time Gandhiji went on a city-tour. Normally we cannot imagine Gandhiji visiting museums and churches, but in Rome, it did happen. Mahadev has given a pleasant description.

"We got a full recompense of about two hours spent in the Vatican. Whatever little I have seen of the world, I have seen nothing that could compare with the museum of the beautiful murals and sculptures of the Vatican's Cistine Chapel. The statue of Jesus on the Cross in the chapel could melt a stony heart over and above the incomparable paintings of Michelangelo. Gandhiji stood before the statue for some moments, saw it from almost all sides and said, 'It is so beautiful that one can shed tears over it!' One of the best sculptures in the Museum is 'Laokun' (Mussolini)²⁰ Three sculptors, a father and two sons have used up all their skill for the above ('Laokun') sculpture, in expressing the idea of the constant effort of man to be free from the worldly woes, which is portrayed in the form of the fangs of a cobra. The other sculpture to draw attention was that of the Nile. A gigantic man was lying down as an emblem of Nile. In one hand he held 'prosperity' while in the other he had ears of corn. On the body of that gigantic man, there were small kids dancing, and some kids riding whale and merging in a river. Gandhiji said, 'This looks like the Ganges.'"²¹

The two well-built English bodyguards, Evans and Roger, who were with us during our entire English tour, were with us till we boarded the boat at Brindisi. Gandhiji said at the time of parting:

"Your services were invaluable. I am not capable of rewarding you monetarily. But I shall try to give as a memento, whatever you desire." They asked for a watch. "Our descendents — children and their children — will preserve it as an invaluable heritage. Please get Gandhiji's name embossed on

it." Gandhiji said, "That is a nice gift you have asked for. We will send you a watch made in England."²²

Mahadev wrote at the end of the Italian tour :

"At the end I would always remember two pictures. One is the Italian Emblem — a heap of iron-rods and an axe. Every Italian Officer has it inscribed on the dress, and that emblem has been painted in golden colour outside Mussolini's huge hall. The Emblem is frightening and its meaning is difficult to understand

"The other picture is of the affectionate welcome wherever we went and of the affectionate send offs. Thousands greeted Gandhiji when he was being escorted through the poor localities. Hundreds of people, policemen as well as soldiers, struggled to get his autograph in Milan, Rome and Brindisi, hundreds wandered behind him in the streets of Rome. The scholars who met Gandhiji at the Milan Station, used a very apt simile for him from Bhagvad Gita, written in beautiful Devnagari script in a letter which said, 'Gandhi, who is engrossed in the welfare of all beings.' An Indian lady walked behind us almost for an hour and when we parted at the coliseum gave us a card on which was written in Devnagari, 'My salutations to the Great Soul, Gandhi.' She held a degree of Master of Philosophy and was a scholar in Sanskrit.

"And lastly when he was climbing the ladder of the 'Pilsana' the following Citation was read out to him :

"Mahatma ! The society of lovers of History and Art of Brindisi salute you. Just as in 1925 we gave your great friend Rabindranath Tagore, a drink in a cup of Fifth Century B. C., in the same way and in the same cup, we offer you, milk, from which you gain strength for the cause of freedom and justice."

"Is it goat's milk ?" Gandhiji asked with a laugh.

"Yes, yes, it is goat's milk, indeed it is goat's milk, many voices spoke out in the Italian language, and Gandhiji drank up the milk from that cup of the Fifth Century B. C."²³

Gandhiji and his party reached Bombay on 28th December 1931. Gandhiji's hostess in England, Miss Muriel Lester and the two bodyguards, Evans and Rogers, returned from Italy. Mr. and Mrs. Privet who joined them in Europe travelled as deck passengers, with them to Bombay.

On the way at Aden Gandhiji summed up his visit to the Round Table Conference in the following words :

"When I left for London, I had said in Bombay that I shall be thankful to God if I could return from London, unsullied. And I am happy to tell you that though I have returned with

empty hands, I have come back without getting them dirtied."²⁴

Pyarelal, one of Gandhiji's secretaries has done the same, though a little more at length :

"I accept that I have returned with empty hands, but I am satisfied that I have preserved the prestige of the flag, which was handed to me, and have not allowed it to go down. All the time I have taken care and prayed that I may do or say nothing in a moment of weakness which may dim the glory of my country or I may prove to be unfit for the faith reposed in me by my countrymen."²⁵

When Gandhiji was going to the Round Table Conference, our national poet, Jhaverchand Meghani wrote :

"Drink up this last cup of poison, Oh Bapu !"

Kanu Desai, a famous artist from Gujarat had painted a picture of Gandhiji, marching at the time of the Dandi March.

With reference to the above two artistic creations, Mahadev explained, in his typical style, alongwith the description of the situation during the first few days before Gandhiji's departure to England, the feelings that arose from those creations

When they returned from England, they had to face a tense atmosphere. And so in that context Mahadev's description of the poem and the painting before the foreign tour, became more meaningful

If someone forgot the story of this picture, and took up the farewell poem "The Last Cup of Poison" written by Meghani - printed along with the picture - for a moment the question would be whether the poem was inspired by the picture or the picture by the poem !

I feel that Kanu Desai's picture fits in more appropriately into Gandhiji's tour of England. The impress of seriousness displayed in the picture applied more to the England's tour than to the Dandi March. But we can be happy looking at the picture, looking at it, we can imagine the feelings expressed by it, but the pleasure of the poem is also something unique, while reading the poem one experiences the feeling that Meghani's soul must have been a constant witness to Gandhiji's turmoil in the last fifteen days before going to England. It seemed as if Meghani watched, hidden by an invisible cloak, every move, beginning with the letter from Mr. Hoston on 11th August, to the 27th, when they left Simla

"Your life goes on with endless faith,

Yet your dealings have to be with cheats and frauds,

You sleep easily in the enemy's lap,

This is the last pillow where you surrender your head !

You have to measure the enemy's mind,

Though he may cut your throat,

Take this last cup of poison Oh Bapu !

Do not drop a handful when you have drunk oceans of it !" ²⁶

The meaning of this poem written before Gandhiji's tour of England became more applicable to the pathetic and cruel welcome accorded to him by the British Government on his return to India.

FOOTNOTES :

1. CWMG - 48 p. 439
2. Publications Division *Romain Rolland & Gandhi Correspondence*, pp. 3 to 22 selected
3. *M. D.'s Diary* - 15. p. 424 (Guj)
4. Ibid. pp. 426 to 433, selected
5. Ibid. p. 433
6. Ibid. p. 433
7. Ibid. pp 436 to 438 selected
8. Ibid. p. 439
9. Publications Division *Romain Rolland & Gandhi Correspondence*, p. 198
10. Lizan is a village near Geneva Lake On 8-12-31 Gandhiji had a meeting there.
11. *M. D.'s Diary* - 15, p. 481 (Guj)
12. Ibid. p. 482 (Guj.)
13. Ibid. pp. 484-85 (Guj.)
14. Publications Division, *Romain Rolland & Gandhi Correspondence*, p. 453
15. Ibid. p. 455
16. Ibid. p. 475
17. *M. D.'s Diary* - 15, p. 486 (Guj.)
18. Ibid. p. 490 (Guj.)
19. Ibid. pp. 491 to 495 (Guj)
20. Ibid. p. 4 (Guj.)
21. Ibid. p. 491 (Guj.)
22. Ibid. p. 498 (Guj.) Gandhiji fulfilled that promise on reaching India.
23. Ibid. pp. 498 to 500 (Guj.)
24. Ibid. p. 515 (Guj)
25. Miss Muriel Lester, *Gandhiji-Europe-Yatra*, Preface, p. 3
26. *M. D.'s Diary* - 15, p. 4



21/11/20
202 203

न व ल व न

साहंभपुर

अमदावाह

It is a matter of so small consolation to me that the manifesto I have recently issued on behalf of my party has been received in all quarters with general approval. But it has been suggested to me that I should, if I could, further ~~assist~~ supplement my efforts ~~in this~~ to bring about peace by ~~certainty~~ ~~dismissing~~ making the attitude of my party still clearer so as to leave no room for any misgivings that may still be lingering. It is being represented ~~to~~ me that whilst ~~my~~ ^{the} manifesto ~~will~~ ~~clearly~~ ~~put~~ the Congress at ease,

Mahadev's English hand-writing



નવજીવન

સારંગપુર

અમદાવાદ

૨

it does not put the ~~people~~ people at ease, that I should, if possible, reassure the people that their minds would not be distracted ~~by~~ from their ^{efforts} ~~attempts~~ at constructive work. It is a ~~disappointment~~ I think that that assurance has been amply given. But ~~despite~~ if there is the slightest suspicion that it has not been given, nothing would please me better than to ^{unmistakable} repeat that assurance in ~~these~~ ^{language} terms. I need not repeat ~~that~~ ~~it is~~ that our work in the Council's legislature is Non-Cooperation



न व ल व न

सारंगपुर

अमदावाद

3

Non-cooperation, and nothing is short
of Non-cooperation, and The Triple
Goal of Swaraj, and The leaders of
the Khilafat and the Congress are
our only goal. We have not gone
in for any other aims whatsoever,
and ~~we~~ I would warn the public
against looking to our party for
any such aims. Their work is
Constructive work alone, unfettered
and uninterrupted by whatever
happens in the Councils. Their
duty to us is therefore no more
than to watch the process of
Non-cooperation that shall be our



નવજીવન

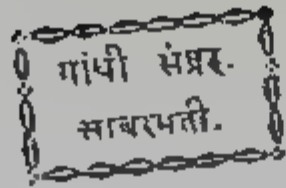
સારંગપુર

અમદાવાદ

4

our only occupation in the ~~C.D.s~~ ^{legislatures},
and it shall be the endeavour
of ~~our~~ party to see that
noncooperation outside the ~~C.D.s~~
~~legislatures~~ in the shape of the fulfilment
of constructive work and other
items ^{leg. boycott & law courts, boycott of ~~schools~~ educational} ~~institutions~~
remains entirely ~~unaffected~~ ^{unaffected} by noncooperation
inside. We are thankful that
the ~~Government~~ Country has sent us
in ~~representatives~~ as their representatives
and we shall be content if they
will respond in ~~the~~ ^{us} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ when
Certification or similar other thing
compels us to make ~~ceaseless~~
a call of C.D. to them.

Patna - 4-12-29



(1) રાજકોટ સ્થાન
પો.કો. દિ.દિ. ૧૮૮૨

સ.ન. ૧૧૪૬૭ ૫૨૭૧

પરમપૂજ્ય બાપુજી,

કામળા નગર, સિંધુ રોડ

તરી પડતું સરકાર કમિયું. કામળા

સાચરખતી સાંકેતી રીતે ઉત્પન્ન

કરે સરકાર. સાંકેતી ન રીતે. પણ સાચરખતી

સાચરખતી પાઠવના તમામ મને સંદર્ભ

પ્રત્યક્ષે. સર્વ ક્ષેત્ર પ્રત્યક્ષે પ્રત્યક્ષે પ્રત્યક્ષે

પ્રત્યક્ષે: એ સંવલોકના સંવલોક બહુ

~~સંવલોક~~ સંવલોક તરીકે લખાઈ. મહા પાપી

દોષ તો એ સંવલોકનાં રીતે રીતે રીતે

મને? પાપનું / ઉત્પન્ન પ્રત્યક્ષે + પ્રત્યક્ષે

દોષે સંવલોક સંવલોક ઉત્પન્ન તરીકે લખાઈ.

અને ~~સંવલોક~~ પાપના પાપના

પ્રત્યક્ષે અને રીતે રીતે રીતે

તો તો, સંવલોક સંવલોક?

એ બંને પ્રત્યક્ષે પાપના પ્રત્યક્ષે

તો તો? ઉત્પન્ન પ્રત્યક્ષે પ્રત્યક્ષે

કરે કરે પ્રત્યક્ષે 'સંવલોકે ૩ કોર્ટ

દે. રાજકોટ ૩ રીતે'. એ સંવલોકના

Mahadev's Gujarati hand-writing —
Letter written to Gandhiji from Patna on 4-12-29

૨ સ. નં. 11467

પાપરાણ મેરુરુડે, આ મેરુ

ઉદિ? એવું પાપરાણ મેરુ

‘ભાગ’ માં આગળના’ એ

મેરુ મેરુ હશે?

ગાંધી સંગ્રહ.
સાચરમતી.

આમના આગળ. અત્યંત

સાચરમતી રહે છે મેરુ મેરુ

ઉદિના આગળ મેરુ ઉદિ

વધી આવવા દે. ઉદિ મેરુ

આમના

લિ. રસ

હરિદેવના પાંચાંદસ

પ્રાચીન

२६
२८.१२-३७

वि. नारायण राव

ଦିଆଁ ଗଢ଼ି ଅଗାଧ ଗୁଣ୍ଡାଏତ୍ତା ରାଜ୍ୟ
 ଗାଁ ଗାଁ, ଅଗାଧ ଗାଁ ଗାଁ ଗାଁ
 ଗାଁ ଗାଁ ଗାଁ ଗାଁ

[illegible]

Letter written to Narayan Desai from Juhu on 28-12-'37

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રવા-એ સારી ઘાડેન મેઘમાં રાખે છે તે
હવે ફેરે:

ન જાતુ કામઃ કામાર્ગો મુપભોગેન શામ્યતિ
હવિષા કૃષ્ણવર્ત્મેવ મૂયઃ પ્રાગ્ભિવર્ધતે ।

ન જાતુ (ફદાપિનાદિ), કામાર્ગાત્ ઉપભોગેન (કામ કોઈ
વિષયોન ~~ઉપભોગે~~ ઉપભોગે, કોઈ તોગે વધારે)
શામ્યતિ (સામે છે કે ન શામ્યતિ શામી નથી)
હવિષા (હવે વડે, થી વડે) કૃષ્ણવર્ત્મા (આગિ) રૂપ
એ મૂયઃ (વધારે વધારે) પ્રાગ્ (અ) અગિવર્ધતે
(વધારે નામ છે).

આ દેખે છે કે સરસ રાત્રી રાખવા લાગે છે
કામ શિદ્ધિયોગ સંધ્ય સંધ્યાનું મહત્ત્વ સારી જાણે
વ્યવસ્થા છે કે તે પારખાત મેં દિવસ
વધારેન કામના સમાપ્ત છે. આ સરસ ગીતાનું
માં બતાવે છે:

ઇન્દ્રિયાણી પરાપચાહુ રિન્દ્રિયેભ્યઃ પરં મનઃ

મનસસ્તુ પરા બુદ્ધિયો બુદ્ધિઃ પરતસ્તુ સઃ ।

ઇન્દ્રિયો ને સૂક્ષ્મ છે, પરંતો વધારે સૂક્ષ્મ

ના છે, ³ મોટી પીરુન જુદી છે, પી
 જુદી પીરુન સુધી છે. નાએ
 પીરુ

આપણે પીરુનું ઉદાહરણ લઈએ. પીરુનું
 સૂત્ર આ રીતે સ્થાપિત કરે છે; એનામાં
 સૂત્ર આવી વધારે રૂપ સ્થાપિત પીરુ.
 તે વધારે ~~સૂત્ર~~ રૂપ સ્થાપિત કરાય
 છે, એને આપણે નોંધી લઈએ. તેના
 રીતે સૂત્ર, તે વધારે રૂપ સ્થાપિત,
 તે વધારે રૂપ સ્થાપિત, તે
 વધારે રૂપ ના, તે જુદી અને
 તેના માટે તે પીરુ છે. એ રીતે
 પીરુના માટે પીરુના સંદર્ભમાં
 રાખી, એને વધારે વધારે રૂપ સ્થાપિત
 પીરુના રીતે દર્શાવે છે.

આના કારણે પીરુના માટે
 નોંધવા જે પીરુ. નાનાં વધારે
 નાનાં વધારે રીતે. પીરુ

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 પીરુ વરસ પીરુ નાની ગતિ એ
 રીતે લખી દેલી. એના માટે પીરુ
 પીરુ રીતે. નાના રીતે રીતે
 નોંધી દેલી.

રીતેના આપણના પીરુ (૧૨),
 રીતેના નોંધી લઈએ
 રીતેના નોંધી લઈએ.

નોંધી
 આપણને

(૫)

જુહુ

30-12-37

શ્રી. બાબુભા,

તમે જાણીપણી તમે
 ગામનાં લખુંડું, પછી બહાર ચાલે માટે
 માટે તમારું બાબુભા જે ચાલે રહેશે
 ચાલે ચાલે તું સમજાવે. બાબુભા
 શેઠદાસ ચાંદર સંરતનાં નિર્દોષના
 રહેલો છે તું ગમે તેલો મારે
 દેખ તો પછી તારી સંરતનાં ચાલે
 નિર્દોષના ચાલે સદા ચાલે પાવિત્રના
 માટે ચાલે જાણે પછી દેખ
 પાવિત્ર વધારે તમે ચાલે
 તમે જાણીપણી ચાલે પાવિત્રના
 જે ચાલે તમે ચાલે પાવિત્રના
 પૂ. બાબુભા પછી તારા જાણીપણી
 જાણીપણી તમે જાણીપણી
 ચાલે પાવિત્રના ચાલે પાવિત્રના
 તમે જાણીપણી તમે જાણીપણી
 હું ચાલે "પાંડુર" દેખાતી,

Letter written to Narayan Desai from Juhu on 30-12-'37

પાંદુરંગ મંત્રી કાલ રાત્રે બેઠે ગયા.
 એણે જુલાઈ, મુરદાબાઈ અને
 પારેલાઈ સાથે દેવા. આમને લઈ બહાર
 ના શાંતિ મુખાર માઈ મને ગઈ
 રસનામાંના ઉદ્ય આવી દેલી અને
 મનાં મેરું હતું જે યાંપા ઉદ્ય
 આવી નહોતું ના જુ મેરું? પપ્પા
 યાં આ પછી એ રેર આવી
 ગયું અને ઉદ્ય ના ઉડેલ ગઈ
 મુસરામની પત્ની ના આલિશા
 મને બહુ ગામો અને દુપડા
 આપે પપ્પા આપ્યાં. અને મને
 બાપુ બહુ રાદ આવી, નાં
 મુસરામની તમામ અને પવિત્રા
 નાં હું ક્યાંક હતું? મુસરામનો
 આજે પાદે જે મપાલે નાં
 નેનું ગામ — પાલનપરે છે. એ
 મપાલે બાપુને પાસે ગાવડાવે
 હશે બહુ ભાઈ ગાયું. હવે

એ મહાપરના રહેલા છે તે આવી
 અને રહેલા છે તેમાં "જુજરામ"
 ની કિંમત બાપુને બતાવી.
 બાપુ એટલા વાળા નોંધતા મહત્ત
 કરેલા છે એટલે એટલે મારે મેલ્યા
 તમારું આદરથી મારી જાણવા
 નોંધતા બાપુ જે કહેશે તે તે
 આ તમારો મારા જાણવાનો
 વિચાર મને દર્શાવે?

પાલલી રા દેવદા રંગેની
 જે એ મહાપરના મૂળે - જુજરામનાં
 તમારો ઉત્તર રંગ ગાળી
 અને તમારો ગાળા નોંધતા આ
 કિંમત મને મૂળે બતાવી દેવું -
 + આ મહાપર જુજરામનાં મૂળે
 આદરથી રંગ તમારો દર્શાવે
 અને બધા ગાળા એ મહાપર જુજરામ
 ના ગાળામાં રહેલા છે એ મહાપર મૂળે
 જુજરામનાં મૂળે રાખું ખડું મૂળે

જાણું અગાં પાછી - દયાં
કોણે જોઈને નીકાર કરી.

હોં આપાની આગળ જુ મરણ
માનવરૂપે - કરીને ખરી સાચવેલ
તે કંઈ ગામડે, આગ પોતા લડના
કરોળો દમલ મરે અગાં અગી
પાછી પાવલું હાથે તમ પાણી
ગમલે કોણે કંઈ ગામડે
માનવ રૂપે - કરીને ખરી સાચવેલ
તે મેં રાખું છે:

આગાં બીજાં એકલે.
બીજાં એકલે રાખાવેલ - આગાં
એકલ બીજાં પાણી, તર કોઈ કોઈ
જાણુ દેશે, સુખને રૂપે - આગાં
બીજાં - આગાં, કોઈ એકલ
બીજાં રૂપે દેશે દેશે
પરં આગાં બીજાં એકલ - આગાં

આગાં અગાં રાખાવેલ જુ મરણ
જોરના પાત્ર જુએલે આગાં અગાં
રાખાવેલ સીધાં પાણી આગાં

પ્રથમ બાબ રોપાડું, નમોદી ફાળા
 ફુટમાં, ૫૯૧ રોપાડાઓ અને સંગ્રહ
 ઉડવાં, થયા. એક બાબ ના પડે માં
 દેવ કરાડો, ~~બાબ~~ ઉડો માં બાબ પડે માં
 હતાં, તે કરાડો ઉડો ઉડા, નમો
 ફુલ ફાળામાં, બાબ આપરે નમોદી
 રહે બાબ હું બાબ. નમોદી ફાળા
 નમોદી બાબ રૂપ છે તે સંગ્રહ
 રૂપમાં સંગ્રહમાં આપરે
 વિદ્ય પડે જે છે બાબ આપરે
 વિદ્ય એક વિદ્ય બાબ માં આપરે
 વિદ્ય થાય છે.

આ નમોદી ફાળામાં જુનરામ મસ
 હતાં હાથે ખોલે માં માં ગારી થઈ
 રહે છે. આપરે નમોદી ફાળા નમો
 બાબ આપરે ઉડો; બાબ આપરે
 ઉડો ફાળા જે છે હાથ
 રોપાડો બાબ અને વિદ્ય થાય
 હાથ બાબ. જુનરામ માં પાંચ
 નમોદી ફાળા બાબમાં ઉડો

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હોતોયું હતું એટલે તે પ્રાણ
 વિશે પોતાનું ઘર લખાવ્યું,
 અને પાલનું બંને એક પાલનું
 બાંધી રાખવામાં તે પરમાત્માની
 યોગ્યતા દર્શાવે.

પાલ દેવ એક જગ્યા
 બાંધી દેવે. એટલું તમારું

જોઈએ તો તેને કહો કે
 ગાંધી. અને એ તે જગ્યા સુધે
 રાખે. તેમાં દર્શાવે એક પાલનું
 ગાંધી તે જગ્યા બાંધે? કે
 બાંધે?

એક જગ્યા
 બાંધવામાં
 પાલ દેવે. બાંધવામાં તમારું
 રાખવા કહેવામાં. પણ શાંતિ અને
 આરામ છે. બાંધે. તમારું બાંધે
 બાંધે એ એક જગ્યા સુધે રાખે પાલ
 એટલે તમારું પાલ બાંધે બાંધવામાં બાંધે
 તરફ.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A SERVANT, A FARMER AND A PORTER

When Gandhiji and his party disembarked at Bombay, the cruel realities about the Indian situation awaited them.

The people of India welcomed Gandhiji with unparalleled love and enthusiasm, in spite of the fact that he had returned empty-handed from the Round Table Conference. Rarely in history a leader of any country was welcomed so heartily by his own people. Gandhiji had gone with a demand of complete independence and had returned without getting anything at all. But the people intuitively knew, that Gandhiji had enhanced the self respect and honour of our country. On one hand, a crowd of flatterers had collected and were bitterly competing among themselves for small, selfish gains, on the other, this single man had exalted our nation's position and made the English people and the representatives of the Empire conscious that the real India is in its villages, in its poor people and in its lowliest. He had not appealed, he had not begged, he had made his claim not for his caste, religion or party but for the whole nation and the people of that nation had realised this. And so there were victory celebrations for a leader who had returned to his motherland after an apparent defeat.

The representatives of the Government who had broken the terms of the compromise under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact immediately after it was arrived at and those who were drunk with power could not tolerate the speech of this worshipper of non-violence. And so the Government had decided to show its power-drenched pride the moment, Gandhiji returned from abroad.

The rule of Ordinances, which had already begun even before Gandhiji went abroad, became wide-spread before his return. Arrests were being made at numerous places. In the North-West Frontier Province, it seemed the Government had been terribly agitated because of the non-violent army of the Khudai Khidmatgars. Quiet processions had been shamelessly fired upon. Khan Abdul Ghaffar

Khan had been arrested in the Frontier Province before Gandhiji's return. Jawaharlal was arrested on the way from Allahabad, when he left to welcome Gandhiji and to attend the Congress Working Committee Meeting.

Gandhiji registered his opposition in this matter with the Viceroy through a telegram and raised a doubt as to whether all these actions of the Government indicated an end to the cordial relations between himself and the Viceroy. He had also asked whether the Viceroy would like to meet him to give him guidance as to the advice he had to give to the Congress. The Viceroy did not deem it necessary even to reply to that telegram. His secretary sent a telegram stating that the Viceroy could meet Gandhiji to discuss how Gandhiji could use his influence to maintain the spirit of co-operation displayed during the Round Table Conference, but that no discussions would be held regarding the Ordinances.

The meeting of the Congress Working Committee was held at Bombay in this tense atmosphere. The Working Committee announced a programme of a struggle against the situation created by the Government by its breach of the Gandhi Irwin Pact.

Newspaper reporters met Gandhiji daily during this period. The Moderates had hopes that some compromise would be arrived at and so they requested Gandhiji not to go to Sabarmati immediately. Sardar Vallabhbhai also wanted Gandhiji to stay at Bombay and Gandhiji did just that. But both Gandhiji and Sardar were arrested in the early morning of 4th January 1932.

Mahadev was arrested at Sabarmati after three days. The atmosphere at that time was so charged that the Ashram children used to feel proud, to see their elders arrested. Seven year old Babla bid adieu to his father as he was getting into the police-van with the words, "Kaka, this time you should get a sentence of not less than two years."

Mahadev was released on the 4th February 1932 from Sabarmati jail with a notice served on him to daily report to the police in the evening. He disobeyed this notice, and so was arrested on the same night. Next day he was sentenced to one and half years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200/- and if he did not pay the fine, three more months of imprisonment. Initially he was kept in the Sabarmati jail, but on the 18th February 1932 he was shifted to the Nasik jail.

Mahadev has made notes in his diary upto the 3rd January, till Gandhiji's arrest. He has stated therein that they must have prepared for Gandhiji's arrest well in advance, because the letter written by the Viceroy's secretary, Mr. Maxwell, to the head of the police did not have any date. It was Gandhiji's day of silence, but he gave two

written messages. The first message was a special request to the labourers to preserve calm in face of any amount of provocation, and the other message was addressed to the English people through Verrier Elwin. Gandhiji had said that he had loved them as much as he loved his own countrymen, and that he had done nothing with hatred and contempt towards them. He had behaved with them as he did with his own relatives.

In the first week of January when Mahadev was in Ahmedabad he wrote a letter to the associations of businessmen expressing joy at the support they had given to the movement; and had also appealed to continue that support by boycotting British goods.

From the diaries of those days it appeared that Mahadev began a deep study of the Gita on reaching Nasik Jail.

To his pleasant surprise he was shifted to the Yeravda Prison with Gandhiji and Sardar on the 10th March 1932. The first page of his diary expressed his deepest feelings :

"10-3-'32

"Hari Om Shri Sadgurave Namaha !

"I never dream that I was going to be lucky enough to see, 10-3-'32, this day. Yes, once at Nasik, I did dream that I was at Yeravda. I was taken to Bapu and I started weeping after falling at his feet. I just couldn't control my tears. Roach came in the morning and said, "Come on, you are being shifted. You have an hour to get ready." I asked, "Where to?" He said, "You would be happy when you know it and will thank me, but I cannot tell you." I asked to meet Dr. Chandulal, but did not get the permission. We started from Nasik at nine in the morning. The same policemen, who were with me, had left Vitthalbhai here, a few days ago. One of the policemen was known to me for a long time before this. He was a butler to Sir Charles Inns when Bapu went to meet Lord Reading on 17th June 1920 - the butler remembered the date too. Then he joined the police-force after being with Ubank and Rao Saheb Gunvantrao Desai. He had seen me in Simla. He had even seen me at Vitthalbhai's place. His memory was remarkable.

"When Akbar Ali embraced me with moist eyes in Sabarmati and said after being locked up in his cell, 'My prayers are that they may keep you with Gandhiji!' I said, 'Your prayer may be there, but how can I be so lucky?' He said, 'Nevertheless, my prayers are with you.' I had heard all sorts of stories about Akbar Ali. And yet he showered love on me. And his prayers bore fruit !

"Pyarelal had told everyone in Nasik that they had made arrangements with Martin about this transfer. I had thought it

was a fib. But that also was the truth.

"The reception at the jail-gate was rather cold and so I felt that I was transferred so that they could get rid of me from Nasik, and that I will not be allowed to see Bapu. But just then a smiling Katchi appeared and said, 'Come with me. We came to know only at four o'clock that we have to keep you with Mahatmaji' Bapu was surprised when I bowed down to him. He slapped my back, head and cheeks. Bapu had never shown so much affection. I was lost in thankfulness and the consciousness of my being unworthy. I came to know from Bapu and Sardar that Sir Purushottamdas also was involved in my coming to Yeravda. Dahyabhai had said last time, 'I have done what was to be done'."

Gandhiji, Sardar and Mahadev had moved in Kheda and Bardoli together, to supervise the implementation of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. This trio was once again together after almost a year. Gandhiji wrote about these three people living in one cell to Gangaben Vaidya in a letter:

"Here we are a servant, a farmer and a porter. If the like of us put on royal robes, the village urchins would pelt stones at us and we should have deserved such treatment."²

After the interval of the Round Table Conference the fight for freedom had begun again. The Government's preparations in its own way, were endless. The leaders had been arrested. The volunteers were harassed. The people were intimidated. The Moderates among the intellectuals were kept involved in negotiations, most of the media was controlled and was made to give publicity favourable to the Government. Every effort was made to spread one-sided publicity in England and other countries and numerous ordinances were promulgated to cover up the monopolistic and autocratic power in the guise of law and order.

For the Satyagrahis there remained nothing else but to undergo long terms of imprisonment. A number of Satyagrahis demonstrated their faith and self-confidence by suffering in various ways at various places. The movement had weakened a little during the latter months of 1932 after a great onrush in the beginning of the year. The people were overawed. Their sympathy was with the movement but they did not have a programme aggressive enough to give the movement a direction.

The centre for the movement at the time was Yeravda Jail, and the main characters of that centre were the same servant, farmer and porter in Gandhiji's words. The fire, conflagration of patriotism, was burning in the minds of all the three. Self-purification adorned the heads of the trio. Had they been out of jail, they would never have

found time to spare. But they used every moment purposefully while in prison. They looked at life with a positive attitude and their hearts were rent asunder whilst reading or hearing about the situation outside. And yet they passed their days pleasantly. All three believed that self-purification through penance had a direct connection with freedom. And so they welcomed the penance of prison-life. Each one of them was progressively preparing his heart and mind through his individual thought, reflection and study when he thus got the chance of being at ease. Actually it was a team of three, and so constantly looked after each other. And yet the nature of each differed from the other, and so the activity also varied. Let us look at it closely. Mahadev's diary has shed a lot of light on this subject.

Mahadev was kept with Gandhiji in this jail for a long period, but, in this chapter we would cover only the period from March 10th upto his fast which began on September 26, 1932 against the decision for separate electorates.

Before Mahadev was brought to Yeravda from Nasik, Gandhiji was seriously thinking of strongly opposing the Government's plan for granting separate electorates to the untouchables. He had written a letter on the subject to Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India on the 11th March 1932, in which he had reminded Sir Samuel of what he had said at the Round Table Conference that he would oppose separate electorates even at the cost of his life, and that this was not just talk or was said in a moment of emotion.

Gandhiji inquired of Mahadev about various things and people and then touched the topic of separate electorates. "Did Vallabhbhai say anything to you or not?" Vallabhbhai said, "Let him at least have his meal, then we will talk." Mahadev was shown the letter to Sir Samuel after dinner and was asked to give his opinion. He found Gandhiji's argument clear and unequivocal and he guessed that Vallabhbhai must be debating as to how he could give his consent to Gandhiji to fast, in his own capacity as Congress President. But Gandhiji said that he could understand that Vallabhbhai could not give his consent as a colleague, continuing, he said about his relationship with him, "I have never thought of Vallabhbhai as a religious thinker. He has always thought politically, which is the proper thing to do. My relationship with him is also not religious. Whilst my relationship with you is religious. Vallabhbhai's difficulty is that the fast would be misunderstood. The government will say that it is just like Gandhi, he has become crazy and that let him behave in an insane manner . . . how does it matter if I am considered crazy and I die? There, it would be the end of the false Mahatmahood bestowed on me." For seven months since this talk, this trio lived under the shadow of the thought of Gandhiji's fast.

But the mental attitude of all the three was such that without getting perturbed, they passed their days in joint pleasantries.

We have noted earlier during Gandhiji's fast for communal harmony in 1924, that in relation to fasting, he relied upon the voice of his conscience and so there never was much scope for discussion and thought. But as he considered this fast as an ultimatum to the Government, he had decided to have discussions about it.

Gandhiji was kept in the European Ward of the jail. He was given special permission regarding food and other things. He was allowed to write any number of letters on non-political subjects. So Gandhiji's main activity was to write letters to people outside and to those in various other prisons when allowed to do so. The major portion of these letters was to the Ashramites. Every week he used to write a letter to the Ashram. Vallabhbhai had named that day as the homeward-mail-day. After Mahadev's arrival Gandhiji got many letters written by him. There were many in the Ashram who wanted letters written by Bapu himself, and Bapu also felt satisfied when he wrote letters to many in his own hand. Nevertheless, Gandhiji's own effort in letter-writing had decreased since Mahadev's arrival and Gandhiji's enthusiasm to dictate longer and a greater number of letters had increased. And yet Mahadev only said, "Today Bapu wrote 42 or 40 letters." Mahadev's additional work was to write down the gist of most of these letters in his diary, he noted down some important sentences, and kept complete copies of some of them. He also wrote down the gist of inward letters before taking down the notes of the outward ones. This was rather easy for Mahadev as prison-life was a time of comparative rest for him. There was a lot of diversity in the letters corresponding to the wide spread activities of Gandhiji's life. The letters ranged from the light-hearted ones to the Ashram children, to the philosophical, from the technicalities of spinning and carding, to health and the practice of Satyagraha. Gandhiji's way of arguing was unique — specially about ethical and spiritual subjects.

"When we plan to base our lives on restraint one thing should be remembered that we are all a part of the Almighty and so we are imbued with his nature. And wantonness can never be a part of the Almighty, so it is proved that wantonness is contrary to human nature."⁴

A young woman asked about the eulogy of beauty. She informed Gandhiji that she had eulogised the handsomeness of a boy in college and that she was charmed with Jawaharlal's beauty. Mahadev wrote:

"Bapu described aphorisms of beauty in three sentences. Beauty should certainly be praised, but silent praise is better

Moreover, 'renounce and enjoy'. Of one who is not filled with joy by the beauty of the sky, it may be said, that nothing will please him. But those who dream, in the delirium of their joy of building a flight of steps to reach the constellations, live in ignorance."⁵

Gandhiji was a storehouse of experience. It was natural that he occasionally spoke about those experiences. And it seemed to be Mahadev's duty to note down these matters. Once while dictating letters he said :

"You have heard Kitchner's name, haven't you ? He used to say, 'You do not perform any task which does not have a reason.' I (Mahadev) said, 'I have many times said the same thing about you that he does not do anything without reason because not a single activity of his is useless.' Bapu said, 'Yes, you are right. I can give you a reason even for cleaning my nose at a particular place.'"⁶

Gandhiji reacted with pride when he heard that Kasturba was given 'C' class in the prison. A Satyagrahi feels a pride mixed with pleasure when he is tested. But then his humanitarian feelings raised their heads. "Was he not ashamed to give hard labour to a 60-year old woman ?" He told Vallabhbhai with a laugh, "You ought to have got a 'C' class". Vallabhbhai said, "I would be very happy if I am sent to a camp-prison."⁷

Gandhiji believed that a Satyagrahi could not insist on having interviews with people from outside, but he considered it not only his right but also his duty to know about the condition of other prisoners for which he quite often had arguments with the jail officials.

Gandhiji felt terribly anguished when the prisoners in Karachi jail were whipped for singing national songs, and the District Magistrate published a note in defence of the punishment. At the same time he became very happy at the news of Malaviyaji and Sarojinidevi being arrested.⁸

Parts of the letters, noted down by Mahadev, made it easy to understand Gandhiji's attitude. A woman wrote to him, "I must accept my extreme laziness as I just cannot write my diary." The experimenter with truth immediately wrote in reply, "Laziness is not the only reason for your not writing the diary. It is difficult to write the truth in it. Try to do it and see."

Gandhiji's personality was ever evolving. And so, many of his thoughts also had a progressive bent. His letter to his third son, Ramdas, expresses the development in his thoughts regarding husband-wife relationship :

"My ideas about the relations between husband and wife have changed. Of course, I would not like any of you to behave towards his wife as I did towards Ba. She has lost nothing through my strictness, of course, for I never regarded her as my property. I always had love and respect for her. I only wished to see her grow spiritually. However, she could not be angry with me, whereas I could with her. I did not give her the same freedom of action which I enjoyed and she did not have the capacity to exercise it either. . . . I, therefore, wish that you should treat Nimu as having the same freedom which you have.

If you wish to enjoy immoral pleasure with another woman, you will not be afraid of Nimu. That you may be held back by your love of Nimu is another matter. Similarly, Nimu should be free to enjoy immoral pleasure with another man without any fear. Mutual love may save a couple from sin, but there should be no fear of each other. . . . My behaviour towards Ba at Sabarmati progressively became in line with this attitude and the result was that she changed. Even if I feel angry with her, I turn the anger on myself. The cause of anger is my attachment to her. The results will be more beautiful only if my love becomes purer still. Numberless women trust me spontaneously. I am sure that the reason of that is my love and respect for them. Invariably they produce an effect all the time."

He wrote in a letter to Premaben Kantak :

"I had opponents in the past and have them even today. But I have never felt angry with them. I have not wished them ill even in my dreams. The result is that many opponents have become friends. No one's opposition has had any effect on me. . . .

"It is not necessary to cultivate pride or contempt in order that one may be able to stand against the world. Jesus stood against the world. Buddha stood against his times and Prahlada also acted in the same way. All of them were humility incarnate. To have such humility, one must have faith in oneself and in God."¹⁰

Gandhiji received a letter from a seventy-year old pensioner and a patient of Asthma, asking him for a natural remedy for his disease. Gandhiji replied to him. Mahadev asked :

"Why do you go on replying to such letters ?" Gandhiji agreed with him and tore off the letter. Sardar then said, "Oh ! Write to him, 'fast, eat spinach, red pumpkin, drink soda' " Gandhiji laughed uproariously and told Mahadev, "Pick up that letter, we should write to him !" And getting the pieces collected, he dictated the remedies

according to his experience.”¹¹

Gandhiji was content with people like Jivrambhai working in Orissa and Jethalal Sampat working in Madhya Pradesh. He described Jethalal's experiment as 'scientific' and gave the basic rules for rural service in a long and affectionate letter.

“1 . . . You must settle there permanently. The one thing needful is infinite patience with self confidence at the root of it . . .

2 . . . A scientific experimenter has profound confidence in himself . . . at the same time he is so humble that he is never satisfied with his own work. . . .

3 . . . You should cultivate a desire to take tips even from those who are working on other lines.”¹²

Mahadev's note, about the letter from Harilal, Gandhiji's eldest son, is subtle :

“There is a painful letter from Harilal. There is a request to get Manu released from Baliben. He holds Bapu responsible. He had complained about Baliben's attack. Bapu wrote a long letter to him. But the last part of the letter is like the drops of blood oozing from the hurt of a father who is full of forgiveness. ‘I will not give up hope of your reformation, for I have not given up hope about myself. I have always believed that I was a bad man when Ba carried you in her womb, but after your birth I have been doing greater and greater penance for my former life. How can I, therefore, give up all hope? I will continue to hope as long as you and I are alive. And hence, contrary to my usual practice, I am preserving your letter so that, when you have awakened, you may see the insolence of your letter and weep over it and laugh at your folly. I am not preserving this letter to throw it in your face then but only that I may laugh at it, if God wills that I should see that day. All of us are full of shortcomings. But it is our *dharma* to overcome them. I pray that you do so.’”¹³

The youngest son, Devdas, was imprisoned in far off United Provinces. He was alone there. He was suffering from an unrelenting fever for a number of days. He wired to his father. “I HAVE BEEN GETTING FEVER SINCE LAST TWELVE DAYS. A MILD TYPHOID HAS BEEN SUSPECTED. THE HIGHEST TEMPERATURE WAS 102° AND SINCE LAST THREE DAYS IT IS BELOW 100. THE WEATHER IS REALLY BAD. THERE IS NO LETTER FROM YOU.” The father immediately realised and said, “He has described the weather to indicate that if we could get him shifted, we had better do so.” The rest of the dialogue is given in Mahadev's words :

"Vallabhbhai said, 'We must get him shifted' Bapu said, 'Not through any one. If application is to be made we must do it. But I don't feel like it. In South Africa Harilal was in one of the worst jails, but he himself got his transfer, I did not ask for it' Vallabhbhai said, 'Here we are not prisoners. The situation is different, we must apply.' At last Bapu agreed and wired Hailey that my son is in Gorakhpur, a very nasty place, without any reason and any companion. Please transfer him either to Dehradun or send him here to us."¹⁴

The third son, Ramdas, once raised a question on ethics and then queried as to how had Gandhiji, who was once very strict and expected stiff atonements from people, had become very generous? Gandhiji replied thus :

" . . . I do not regret the strictness which I imposed on the occasions which you mention. Now, I feel the slightest degree of strictures as heavy as the weight of the Himalayas. Formerly I had to fast in order to make people do what I can now persuade them to do with a mere rebuke, and other people too had to act more or less similarly. If I continue to act as I used to do, I would be a cruel man. . . . Do you now understand the reason for my liberal attitude? There was the same love behind the strictness of the past as there is behind the liberal attitude of the present. What you say, however, is correct. It would certainly be bad if anybody misunderstood my liberal attitude and became lax. The reason for entertaining such fear is different. It is that I have become less exacting to myself. My former strictness has gone. The body does not obey me. I naturally feel reluctant to ask others to do what I myself cannot. I, therefore, often told the inmates of the Ashram that I was no longer fit to be in charge of it. The gate-keeper who guards the Ashram must be an ever vigilant and strong man. Formerly, I used to work as much as anybody else did, and so the others too had to keep pace with me. But now they do not have the example of my work. They have to follow my preaching. " "

A colleague of Muriel Lester asked in a letter "Why is there a desire to see and enjoy beauty?" He wrote to her :

"A desire for beautiful things is natural. But there is no definite criterion for beauty. And so I have come to the conclusion that it is not worthwhile to satisfy that desire. We must learn to perceive inner beauty instead of a greed for external things. If we know how to do that, a vast field of beauty will open up before us."¹⁵

The same lady asked another question regarding the objective of life. He wrote :

"The objective of life, no doubt, is to know the soul. We cannot realise the soul till we learn how to be one with every living thing. The sum-total of such a life itself is God. And hence, it is necessary to know the God that resides within ourselves. Such knowledge can be attained only through unlimited and selfless service."¹⁷

Gandhiji's many-faceted genius in various fields is evident through Mahadev's notes. His spiritual image also naturally became more evident. He wrote to Premaben :

"The inner voice is something which cannot be described in words. But sometimes we have a positive feeling that something in us prompts us to do a certain thing. The time when I learnt to recognise this voice was, I may say, the time when I started praying regularly. That is, it was about 1906 . . . there was one moment when I suddenly felt that I had some new experience. I think my spiritual life has grown without my being conscious of the fact in the same way as hair grows on our body."¹⁸

These letters give us a glimpse into Gandhiji's inner life. His life otherwise was almost the same as it was in the Ashram. Prayers, twice a day at the same hour as in the Ashram. Some experiments in food. Spinning daily with both hands for about four to five hours on the *Magan Rentia* made by Prabhudas Gandhi. Hours had increased during the National Week. Dictating or writing heaps of letters. Discussions about news items in the newspapers. There is only one exception in the Ashram routine and that is when he, along with Mahadev, tried to answer some competitions. He sent them, without getting any prize and became open to ridicule from Vallabhbhai, "You were considered unfortunate and a fool."

Gandhiji was never tired of writing letters to the Ashram children addressing them as 'Dear Birdies'. He must have felt fresh by writing pleasant things to them. On one hand he explains a serious matter to Vidya, 'God does not have to come from anywhere or to go anywhere. He is always there and will so remain'; while on the other he says, 'I do not think it to be a fault if you play cards during your free time'. Though he adds, 'I wouldn't encourage that'. One girl asks, 'Can one feel enthusiastic about asking for a pardon for a mistake? Would it not be embarrassing? Then why do you say that one should not feel ashamed?' Gandhiji wrote, 'Committing a fault is a bad thing which should make you feel ashamed. To ask for a pardon for the mistake is a good deed, so why should there be embarrassment? Asking for a pardon means a decision not to repeat the mistake. What is there to be ashamed about such a decision? . . .'¹⁹

He wrote to Nirmala :

"Even if we spin to meet our own requirements, the country gains, since it means so much addition to its wealth. And, moreover, we shall have set an example of spending our time usefully and of self-reliance."²⁰

Even before he learned to write, Babla used to request the Ashram music teacher, Pandit Khare, to write his letters to Bapu. He asked a question in one of the letters "We listen to the Gita in the Ashram. In that Arjuna asked a small question and Shri Krishna gave him a long answer. We children ask you so many questions every week. Why do you give such short answers?"²¹ Bapu replied :

"There was only one Arjuna to put questions to Krishna. No wonder then that he could reply to all sorts of questions. Moreover, Krishna had spiritual knowledge. My knowledge is limited, and what a great number of Arjunas who ask me questions! Try and count them. If I give a little of my knowledge to every one of them, how long will that Gita be? Arjuna put questions to Krishna on only one occasion, whereas so many Arjunas ask me questions every week."²²

Mahadev presented Gandhiji in his diaries by becoming a non-entity himself — as if he had taken to heart the following song by Rabindranath Tagore, in his infancy :

Come, remove me, Oh Lord !
And stand upon the lotus of my heart !
Drown my pride in the flow of tears !²³

We saw that the argument, Gandhiji put forward for his proposed fast which he had thought of before Mahadev's transfer from Nasik to Yeravda, was accepted by Mahadev as a 'genuine argument'. Later on Mahadev also gave the reason for it, "The world may understand a fast against oppression, but it may not understand one for the untouchables. The British will try to convince the world that all the untouchables or the majority of untouchables wanted separate electorates. Moreover, I would like you to be more specific in this letter to Samuel Hoare that the giving of separate electorates to the untouchables is like striking the Indian polity with an axe, although many sincere Englishmen also will not be able to grasp this fact."²⁴ Gandhiji agreed with him and said that separate electorate would make untouchability a permanent sin.

Whenever required Mahadev rendered advice to Gandhiji, occasionally their opinions differed but Mahadev was basically Gandhiji's porter. And so when he was asked to sing a song during the prayers on the first day, he sang Surdas's *bhajan* which said :

"Oh God, Please do not think about my faults",

And said in explanation, 'What else could I sing ?'²⁵

Maruti, one of the non-political prisoners who were kept there to work for Gandhiji, touched Mahadev's feet, considering him as one of the holy trio when he saw him with Gandhiji and Sardar. Mahadev explained to him a little hesitatingly, "My dear fellow, I am like you."²⁶

Mahadev wrote sympathetically about Soma and Maruti in his diary.

Initially, although he was kept with Gandhiji, Mahadev got the food and clothes according to the rules of the 'B' class prisoners as specified in his sentence. Mahadev was determined to obey all the jail rules. So he accepted all the objections against his being treated as an 'A' class prisoner without argument. But in a short time he was also classed as a special prisoner along with Gandhiji and Sardar. In between, when for some reason, interviews had been denied to Gandhiji, the Ashramites were informed through Gandhiji's letter to Durgaben that Mahadev's interviews also had been stopped.

Mahadev used to feel elated when he could lessen Gandhiji's burden. And so he wrote with full enthusiasm about 50 letters in his beautiful handwriting, dictated equally enthusiastically by Gandhiji and had them posted. Mahadev did not neglect to take down copies of the important letters amongst those dictated.

Gandhiji received many letters. At times even the jail officials came and told him about some matters from 'outside'. Mahadev got to hear about other prisons and other Satyagrahi prisoners occasionally from Bapu and mainly from Sardar. Mahadev heard about the penance by Kakasaheb, Narahari and Prabhudas. Kaka had to go on a fast for seven days to get his own spinning wheel.²⁷ Prabhudas had to walk to the hospital with the help of two people. Narahari was isolated from the others. Mahadev also had to spend his time like an ordinary prisoner in the Nasik jail. But he did not take into account his own difficulties in face of these of the others. His own penance did not seem to be of any consequence compared to that of the others. "Where is the comparison between the worthiness of these people and my own ? How fitting it would have been had one of these had been kept with Bapu ! But maybe their worth may have to be further increased by more stiff tests, and God may be wanting to embarrass me and increase my self-observation ! When I came to jail I was happy to be with Bapu, but my consciousness of my unworthiness told me that I could not go to him, and now my soul wonders whether it would have been better if anyone from these, more worthy persons, instead of me, had been with him."²⁸

* * *

Ordinarily, within or outside the jail Mahadev used to read more books than Gandhiji but in jail Gandhiji was allowed to have more books. And so it was he who suggested that Mahadev should read the epic poem *Saket* by Maithilisharan Gupta. Gandhiji said it was a two days job to read that poem. Mahadev said:

"I did find it difficult to finish the 450 pages poem in two days. But I started it with the thought that Bapu would not say it thoughtlessly, and read 300 pages before I went to bed. It was very fascinating. If I did not have to get up at quarter to four in the morning, I would have slept after finishing it."²⁹

Next day he wrote a short review of that 'incomparable, charming work' in his diary. If all the reviews of the books, written at random by Mahadev can be collected, a thick volume can be made out of them and not only would that book project Mahadev as a book-reviewer, but it would provide invaluable material to thousands of readers to study excellent works.

There had been some correspondence about *Saket* between Gandhiji and the poet Maithilisharan. Mahadev's opinion was that the Ninth Canto of *Saket*, effectively portraying Urmila's pain of separation from Laxman — her husband — was an imitation of the Sanskrit poets whilst Gandhiji said that the subject of *Saket* was

'Rama, your life itself is a poem,

That life can possibly make anyone a poet'.

If this was the case the Ninth Canto is a diversion from the original subject or an exaggeration. Maithilisharan wrote in defence of Urmila a letter of eighteen pages, which Gandhiji described as a poem in itself. Mahadev noted that 'Ajmeri' who made a copy of that letter was a Muslim disciple of Maithilisharan and was a great lover of Hindu Literature.³⁰

Similarly, in the first part of his diary, Mahadev has highly praised the biography of Ramkrishna written by Romain Rolland.³¹

* * *

During this jail term, Mahadev had studied the draft of cloth-making along with Gandhiji. Daily he spent about five hours in spinning or carding. Gandhiji tried to spin with the left hand, when Mahadev spun fine yarn of 80 counts. Gandhiji started spinning with the left hand because his right hand was paining. Then he practised so much that even that hand started to ache. When Mahadev had to put in a lot of effort to increase his pace in spinning fine yarn, he had reduced the hour on the recommendation of a doctor.

Gandhiji commented in one of his letters that Mahadev continued learning French and Urdu even in jail. When discussing languages, Gandhiji and Mahadev vied with each other in their

insistence on the correct spellings and in the effort to understand the origin of words. An incident is described in Mahadev's words :

"He asked while writing a letter to Miraben, 'What is the spelling of 'inexhaustible' ? Is there an 'h' in it or not ? I have written an 'h' I also became doubtful, referred the dictionary, wherein 'h' was mentioned ' Then he said, 'Examine the root of the word which will clarify it ' The root itself started with an 'h' - haus to draw. Bapu said, 'There are some other such words wherein the 'h' is not there.' I said, 'exonerate' Bapu said, 'Of course not. It has an 'h' in it.' I said, 'It is certainly not there. The root is 'onus'.

"Bapu said, 'No, the root must be honour.' I said, 'We can bet on this and I am sure to win ' We saw the dictionary and I won The next word was 'inexorable'. He was happy and said, 'We learn a lot by knowing the Latin origins.' "32

Mahadev had taken over the chief responsibility of cooking immediately on his arrival.

"Started experimental cooking by preparing *kluchri* and vegetable in the evening Vallabhbhai felt very content It would be very nice if I can serve him thus with a detached mind."33

Mahadev's pen created pleasant pictures of any subject it touched

The prison walls were no obstruction. The worry about Bapu's fast did not impede its progress. Here is an instance :

"Here, the kittens have become very friendly They sit in Bapu's lap during prayers, they play with us and keep on screaming at the time of meals. Occasionally they surround Bapu's legs. Vallabhbhai would tease them and enjoy covering them by a wire-net. Today one of the kittens became very frightened. Ultimately it dragged the net to the end of the verandah by pushing it with its head and then freed itself Thus it used its common sense The poor thing was frightened and walked slowly Bapu felt sorry for it It went a little further away and prepared for toilet. It dug the ground, emptied itself and covered the place. There was not much dust there, so it went still farther It performed there its excretion satisfactorily and other kittens helped covering it up Bapu said, 'Flowers from the skies should be showered on these kittens.' "34

"Today we got the news of Gangaben's death. She had sensed that her end was near, so she became vigilant and died with *Ramanama* on her lips. Bapu wrote to the senior Gangaben, 'We can say that Gangaben added lustre to the

Ashram both through her life and death.' A telegram was sent to the Ashram :

WE WERE ALL TOUCHED LEARN GANGABEN'S DEATH AM HAPPY THAT SHE LIVED WELL AND DIED WELL, WITH FAITH EVERSHINING NO WONDER TOTARAMJI IS HAPPY

On receiving the news Bapu said,

"What a glorious death for that unlettered woman Both of them added dignity to the Ashram."

"Let a death like Gangaben's be our lot. I feel how nice it would be if during the last moments we were in the Ashram and we die with *Ramanama* on our lips like Gangeben, even if there is nothing else in our destiny ! But to have such a destiny at the time of death, one has to have such a life."³⁵

The nation's fight for freedom was on the waves of both ebb and tide from January to September 1932 The British Government in its first attack imprisoned the nation's leaders, but that could not suppress the movement Some new camp jails were immediately established. In the old jails criminals of long-standing were released to make room for the political prisoners The Government functioned not according to normal laws but through Ordinances. Over and above all this, *lathi*-charges on processions and police oppression became a common phenomenon.

After a few months the tide receded, there were fewer Satyagrahis going to jail. Those from the old groups who were released after they had finished their sentences, started rethinking about repeating the jail experience In cities like Bombay Satyagrahi groups were formed sending 'hired' people for Satyagraha.

* * *

Gandhiji daily received scores of letters while the Sardar interpreted, the news which he read in the daily newspapers and periodicals Mahadev, the third member of the trio did not take any initiative but his advice in every matter was very valuable to the other two, and to himself this period was one of greater purification through *karmayoga*. He considered himself quite an ordinary person and went on putting in his best effort

When deliberating over various matters, the situation in the country took precedence over everything else Sardar's thinking was very practical in this direction, keenly comprehensive and was imbued with unique solutions He was very much of a soldier, as he was a farmer, and so ultimately he obeyed Bapu's orders after putting forth his own views

Gandhiji listened attentively to whatever the other two said and imbibed what he felt was worth imbibing, he always thought deeply about Satyagraha as an implement and did some fresh thinking about

it; he was always open-minded regarding the views of others, but was committed to his own principles and was full of self-confidence. Mahadev understood fully the essence of Satyagraha, enjoyed his life with Sardar, assessed it with Bapu, ever-ready to serve both of them, still considered all activities dedicated to Bapu. Bapu was the undisputed captain of this team of three. And the captain was confident that if this test in the term of imprisonment continued in the same way for a further two years, all the dirt within the movement would automatically be cleared. His eagerness was intense but his patience was unlimited.

An incident in Mahadev's words is given here which aptly describes one main characteristic of all the three persons.

"Tomorrow the Satyagraha week begins. So carding has to be started. I asked Bapu, 'How is the thread of the carding instrument?' How often did it break when you carded?' He said, 'If we know how to take care of it, it need not break. It broke when Shankarlal or Kaka took it from me. But it lasted for days when I used it. It is a matter of taking care. Now look at this underwear I am using. I am using it with care. It would have been torn long ago, had it been with anyone else.' Vallabbhbhai said, 'It appears as if you have not used it at all, but hung it on a hook.' Bapu said, 'That is it.' If you know how to take care.' It can be said that Bapu's whole life was covered by those words. Very often I am reminded of 'Kabir, man of service, put on with care, and handed the shawl (body) as it was (to God)', whilst observing Bapu. Who could have alertly looked after the purification of the mind and body for the thirty to thirty-five years as did Bapu?"³⁶

The Government had made only one condition with regard to interview. Interviews with politicians were forbidden but Satyagrahis were allowed to see Gandhiji. Thus the definition of politics was left to Gandhiji. Once Gandhiji understood and accepted the Government's condition, he was very particular in observing it. Even with correspondence it was just the same. Gandhiji did not reply to any reference, direct or subtle, to any political subject. He did not even write his opinion about any book. Even during interviews, he did not, nor did he allow the people who came for the interview to, refer to any political question.

* * *

The Lodhian Committee's report was published in June. Gandhiji commented on hearing the gist of the recommendations for the untouchables:

"This Committee has indeed done a good job by giving a definition of untouchability and have fixed the number of

untouchables at three and a half crores which was being talked of as seven crores. . . . Because of this definition if the Hindus so decide, they can accept and accommodate the untouchables. . . ."³⁷

* * *

"Here is your friend," said Vallabhbhai having read Lord Irwin's lecture in the newspaper. Gandhiji said, "I positively consider him my friend, I would not give my opinion without reading his entire speech."³⁸ But Gandhiji was indeed hurt when he read Lord Sankey's whole article. He said that letter should be written to him. Vallabhbhai said, "Why don't you write that he is a downright liar?" Gandhiji laughed uproariously. He said, "I have said something harsher to him than that, his behaviour is not that of a gentleman. I have gone further and said that he is a betrayer. . . . These things are very bitter to an Englishman."³⁸

* * *

During this period there were communal riots in Bombay. It seemed as if the Government did not want to stop these riots, so much so that it told the people so, and appealed to them to approach the Congress to do something! Both Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai suspected that the Government was inciting and probably even giving guidance to these riots. Gandhiji wrote in a letter:

"At the moment my heart has become as hard as stone so that incidents in Bombay may have affected me, if at all, only unconsciously, and I am not aware that they have. I felt sad for a while but I think I have quietened down after that."³⁹

Normally Gandhiji did not doubt the honesty of the opponents when there were discussions about the country's situation, while Vallabhbhai was highly suspicious. Gandhiji was convinced, on meeting the people in England during the Round Table Conference, that many neutral people in England honestly believed that the British would not believe anything unless and until they were compromised.

Gandhiji was mainly responsible for maintaining purity in the jail atmosphere. At times when he dictated answers to the letters, Sardar would stop for a time from making envelopes from used paper and though not very evident his eyes would be full of admiration. Those letters were serious, yet brief.

Two examples of this gravity and conciseness are given below. A letter of 16th May 1932:

"Ask for anything only in the sacrificial spirit

1. A guru is one who guides us to righteousness by his own righteous conduct;
2. True development consists in reducing ourselves to a cipher;

3. Selfless service is the secret of life;
4. To rise above passions is the highest ideal;
5. The sages, mainly from their own experiences, have laid down rules of thought and conduct. A *rishi* is one who has realised himself;
6. *Sannyasa* according to Gita is the renunciation of actions prompted by desire;
7. Only one who has his body under control, is a man,
8. Beauty, because of its quality of inwardness cannot be experienced in the *physical* sense."⁴⁰

And another letter of 29th June 1932 :

"Q. Who could be said to be in bondage ?

A. One who believes in 'I'.

Q. What is liberation ?

A. Freedom from likes and dislikes

Q. What is hell ?

A. Untruth.

Q. What brings about liberation ?

A. Non-violence.

Q. What is state of liberation ?

A. Freedom for ever from likes and dislikes.

Q. Which is the main gate of Hell ?

A. Untruthful conduct."⁴¹

Mahadev made a note about a suggestion to Naraindas Gandhi, Manager of Sabarmati Ashram that it was advisable to get a man operated for impotency or to teach methods of birth-control to the woman, to save her from her husband's oppression ⁴²

It fell to Sardar Vallabhbhai, to keep the atmosphere full of laughter in this central office of the freedom movement. In 1930 he had given up smoking in the Sabarmati jail. He gave up tea when he was with Gandhiji in 1932 and was taking the same food that Gandhiji took. He had taken up the tasks of rendering personal service, even the smallest one, to Gandhiji, with diligence. When Mahadev joined them in Yeravda Mandir on the 10 March, he took over quite a few tasks of personal service both to Gandhiji and Sardar. Before that time Sardar catered to Gandhiji for his personal needs. His main work was to read newspapers and analyse the political situation. For hours together he used to stride along in the room or outside in the compound during the day. This exercise gave him physical exercise and time for thinking

Sardar's humour and laughter were as nourishing as the bread and butter available in jail.

Gandhiji had a habit of putting in soda-bi-carb in every cooked dish. And so during any discussion if Vallabhbhai could not see the

end of it, he would exclaim, 'Oh why don't you add soda-bi-carb !' On seeing Gandhiji rigorously brushing his teeth for a long time, Sardar would say, 'Why are you brushing them with so much vigour when only a few of them have remained ?' Vallabhbhai had started learning Sanskrit from Mahadev. He was interested in it and so occasionally used portions of Sanskrit in the normal conversations. Once Mahadev committed some mistake, Vallabhbhai immediately said, 'नैतत्त्वमुपपद्यते (this does not befit you) ! He would repeatedly say, 'कृतार्थोहम्' - I am fulfilled or thanks. Once Gandhiji was engrossed in the index of a new book. He queried on reading the expression 'British Bible', what could that be ? Vallabhbhai said, 'Pound, shilling, pence,' and the book gave the very same meaning.^{42a} In one newspaper there was a mention of Gandhiji's constructive vacuities. Mahadev asked Gandhiji, 'What could constructive vacuities be ?' Vallabhbhai said, 'Something like the *dal* you burnt this morning !'^{42b}

In his letter, Gandhiji praised Vallabhbhai's progress in Sanskrit. Once Gandhiji asked Mahadev whether there was any improvement in Vallabhbhai's pronunciations. Mahadev said, "Yes of course. He now realises that a particular pronunciation is wrong. The fact that he is very interested in this study, was not known to him till recently. Now he has discovered something new. He feels as if he has the doors of heavens opened (स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम्) and so is progressing rapidly."

On hearing this Gandhiji said, 'That is the key to learning' ⁴³ At times Gandhiji compared Vallabhbhai's progress to the speed of Arabian horses, at other to the speed of Indra's horses *Vaishnavas*. When Gandhiji first tried spinning with the left hand, he did not succeed for a long time, and Sardar asked him to give up the experiment. At times Gandhiji told him that he would be able to spin if next day Sardar did not look at him at the time. Once he said, "Now watch, to-morrow the spinning-wheel will work. Faith is a very effective thing." Vallabhbhai asked, "Faith even in this ?" Gandhiji said, "Of course, definitely faith." Mahadev noted in his diary of 11-5-1932 the following incident :

"Today Bapu succeeded on the spinning-wheel. He spun 131 yards of yarn in three hours. He said to Vallabhbhai, 'How do you find today's result ?' Vallabhbhai said, 'Oh yes ! There is quite enough of waste too.' Bapu said, 'But once that waste stops, won't you say that I have done it ?' "⁴⁴

Here is an excerpt from the diary of 25-5-1932 :

"On seeing Vallabhbhai preparing envelopes, preserving many things and doing much work, Bapu said, 'What portfolio should we give you in Swaraj ?' Vallabhbhai said, 'I shall take

up tongs and a mendicant's bowl!" Bapu said, 'Das and Motilal talked about their designations; Mohammadali and Shauktali designated themselves as Minister for Education and General of the Army. They were saved from being ashamed, because there was no Swarajya, and they could be nothing.'⁴⁵

FOOTNOTES :

1. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1 - p. 6 (Guj.)
2. Ibid. p. 285; *CWMG* - 50 p. 187
3. Ibid. p. 6 (Guj.)
4. Ibid. p. 15 (Guj.)
5. Ibid. p. 16 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 49, p. 369
6. Ibid. p. 16 (Guj.)
7. Ibid. pp. 20-21 (Guj.)
8. Ibid. p. 116 (Guj.)
9. *CWMG* - 50, pp. 354-55
10. Ibid. p. 360
11. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 29 (Guj.)
12. *CWMG* - 50, p. 73
13. Ibid. 49, pp. 374-75
14. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 231 (Guj.)
15. *CWMG* - 50, p. 353
16. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, pp. 242-43 (Guj.)
17. Ibid. pp. 242-43 (Guj.)
18. Ibid. p. 351 (Guj.)
19. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 233 (Guj.)
20. *CWMG* - 49, p. 211
21. This question has been inserted from the Author's memory.
22. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, p. 54 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 51, p. 89
23. Translated from the Gujarat translation.
24. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 7 (Guj.)
25. Ibid. p. 7 (Guj.)
26. Ibid. p. 8 (Guj.)
27. Kakasaheb Kalelkar
28. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 17 (Guj.)
29. Ibid. p. 26 (Guj.)
30. Ibid. p. 115 (Guj.)
31. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 194 (Guj.)
32. Ibid. 89 (Guj.)
33. Ibid. p. 32 (Guj.)
34. Ibid. p. 139 (Guj.)
35. Ibid. pp. 137-38 (Guj.)
36. Ibid. p. 75 (Guj.)
37. Ibid. p. 199 (Guj.)
38. Ibid. p. 131 (Guj.)
39. *CWMG* - 50, p. 45

40. *CWMG* - 49, p. 450
41. *CWMG* - 50, p. 109
42. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 24 (Guj.)
- 42a. *Ibid.* p. 33
43. *Ibid.* p. 360
44. *Ibid.* p. 150
45. *Ibid.* p. 178

CHAPTER XXXIV

ULTIMATUM AND DECISION

True to the declaration he made at the final session of the Minorities Committee at the time of the London talk that, "I want to say with all emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist separate electorates, I would resist it with my life"¹

Gandhiji started a fast unto death on September 20th 1932. He had given the matter a lot of consideration and had listened to his "inner voice". He informed the Government of his decision and pledge that neither he nor his comrades would announce the fast publicly before it was due to begin.

From the first week of September almost all letters written by Gandhiji were in connection with this decision. In Mahadev's diary of these days the greatest importance was given to the thoughts and news regarding this vow, which Gandhiji was about to observe.

The thoughts in many of the letters were the same though described in diverse ways. Our understanding of the facts will be helped by reference to some of these letters and discussions.

Initially Gandhiji believed that the Government would release him before his fast commenced. Gandhiji was not clear as to his next step if he were released. But he did imagine that he would have to say something or the other in the draft regarding the fast explaining his premise, referring to the Hindu society, the untouchables, the Government, the Muslims, etc. A Satyagrahi moves on with the faith that he can persuade even the wildest of men.

Mahadev opined that people may ask as to why Gandhiji does not see his own shortcoming before finding fault with the Government; why does the Hindu society consider those born in the lowest caste as untouchables? Gandhiji replied that it would be his job to explain this. There would be internal strife if the untouchables were separated permanently. Gandhiji also explained to the other two members of the trio that it was positively and strictly forbidden to

anyone else to fast with him, as peace has to be maintained in the country.

Mahadev had felt that the entire movement of removal of untouchability would last for five to seven years. Gandhiji explained that if the movement became weak as it did in South Africa, it would last a long time and it would take a lot of effort to achieve the ultimate objective. If it were possible to speed up the progress, Gandhiji did not have any objection to co-operate with the arrangement of the new constitution and to go ahead.

Vallabhbhai felt that there was a game in which the separate electorates could be misused politically. The Government would take some untouchables in the administration and keeping others aside, would persuade the untouchables that separate electorates were necessary to have proportionate representation in the Legislatures.

Gandhiji was more concerned about the ethical aspect of separate electorates. He was afraid that the introduction of a separate electorate would destroy the 'untouchables', the 'unknown' and 'invisible' people in the far off corner of the villages. He believed this to be a conspiracy to root out the Hindu social reformers as if they were thorns.

Gandhiji talked about this ethical aspect to Major Bhandari who had come to meet him. The Major asked whether something could be done about it or not? Gandhiji said that if the untouchables united among themselves and asked for a joint electorate it would be accepted.

Gandhiji began to write to his comrades "I expect you to rejoice that a comrade of yours has had this God given opportunity for a final act of Satyagraha. . . "

Mahadev expressed a doubt, "Everyone will flatter Ambedkar and that will encourage his audacity." Gandhiji accepted that that was a possibility.

Mahadev wondered whether this fast had a negative side to it, when Gandhiji said, "That is why it would be good if they do not release me, allow me to fast here and let me die ! But if they release me, I shall clarify that no one should pressurise Dr Ambedkar and that he should accept what he believes in and not anything under pressure."³

Letters and telegrams started arriving from many dear ones.

Sarojini Naidu wrote in a very affectionate and powerful letter :

"Oh Creator of Destiny ! I would say that even if you have seven lives, surrender them to wash off this centuries-old-sin, our nation is never going to be liberated if that horrible blot of untouchability is not washed off, if required, by the sacred blood of people like you. . . For the welfare of the entire

mankind, especially for the unclaimed and pitiable children of the Hindus is your life or death a sinless offering? O you, Creator of Destinies, if you try to hear the voice of God residing within you with an extremely humble and prayerful heart, then you will get an answer that for the highest offering you have to select life, not death!"⁴

Gandhiji wrote a long letter to Sarojini, out of which a couple of small paragraphs are given below:

"Dear Singing Mother, and Guardian of my Soul,

"... The decision was taken after much prayer, in the name of God and at his call. I have no power, therefore, to postpone the hour of execution. . . .

"The motherly affection has blinded the poetic vision and prompted you to appeal to my pride to retrace my steps so as to make me cling to life.

"But I know you have not missed the woman in me. I have therefore chosen the way of life through suffering unto death. I must therefore find my courage in my weakness. . . ."⁵

He wrote to his bosom friend, Herman Kallenbach in Africa:

"If God has more work to take from this body it will survive the fiery ordeal. Then you must try some early day to come and meet. Otherwise Good-bye and much love!"⁶

He wrote to his daughter-in-law and son, Sushila and Manilal:

"Fulfil all my hopes about you. You know what they are. Augment the legacy I leave you. God will surely prosper you!"⁷

On the 17th night he drafted the agreement regarding the fast. Vallabhbhai became excited when he saw very extreme conditions and said, "This thing will be a provocation. For this the Hindu society should have time and adequate notice. They are concerned with getting you to give up the fast. All these demands will be an oppression of the society. This way you cannot strengthen the society." Gandhiji explained that: "This is not to give up the fast. But if I give up the fast today, how can I hide from the people my future course of action? The society must know what I desire from them. Let it ask for six months to consider. But on that day all temples, all schools, and all public places must be thrown open. I want even the religious heads to sign the agreement."⁸

Initially, the Government did not pay any attention to Gandhiji's ultimatum. We could not understand in the beginning whether the whole British Cabinet had discussed Gandhiji's letter to Samuel Hoare or not. As the day of the fast came closer, the Government officials started asking whether Gandhiji's decision was firm or whether there was a likelihood of a change. The final situation was that we were told that the Government has given its

orders. And so there could be a possibility of a change only if the decision was altered by all those concerned in India. What else could be done? This was the attitude of the Government on the day of the fast. Gandhiji had requested that his correspondence with the Government should be published in the newspapers, but it was not done till the last day. That Gandhiji was undertaking a fast was of course made public. But he had not got the chance to put his entire line of thought before the country or the world. And actually Gandhiji had lost faith in the honesty of the Secretary of the State for India as a result of more than one incident. No doubt, Gandhiji only had the reports of the statements of the Secretary of State for India, as they appeared in the newspapers. He did not have any means of getting the correct reports and the question of giving his answer to the people outside did not arise. When Vallabhbhai asked Gandhiji's opinion regarding the second lecture of the Secretary of State, he said, "I am very disappointed to find nothing but cleverness in it. I believed him to be honest, but with this lecture for me he has ceased to be honest and has become clever."⁹

It is the custom of oppressive Government to make founded or unfounded statements about their opponents by imprisoning them and shutting them up from saying anything. This was being done by the topmost political leaders of a country which was called the mother of democracy. Suppression of truth is characteristic of a dictatorship. Mahadev's daily notes and the diaries were the challenge to the effort at smothering the truth. Today, even after sixty years, they keep the flag of truth flying against the oppressive lie of foreign domination.

One who had the means to publish the truth, and whose mouth was not gagged, Horniman of *The Bombay Chronicle*, wrote about Hoare's speech:

"He does not even realise when he becomes dishonest about political matters. Not only that he does not appreciate statesmanlike values, but that he does not know any ethics in statesmanship. This lecture contains shameless admission that makes it clear that the points which were unspoken in the Prime Minister's speech, were kept back with the motive of nullifying the decisions at the Round Table Conference."¹⁰

At the centre of India, Delhi's throne was occupied by a Viceroy who was totally hostile to Gandhiji. Mahadev has noted in his diary of 20-9-1932:

"Bapu said while lying down, Vallabhbhai, I forgot to tell you an interesting story. Willingdon told Sapru and Jaykar, 'Irwin foolishly yielded to that villain of a Bania; I wouldn't.'"¹¹

Gandhiji had decided to put his life at stake to prevent untouchability being given a permanent place in the Indian Constitution. At the age of twelve, Gandhiji had refused to call a *bhangi*, who used to come to clean the toilet, an untouchable because he too had that God within him; and when at the age of 62 he announced his decision at the Round Table Conference to oppose separate electorate for the untouchables at the cost of his life, it was not a statement made by a diplomat, who was playing a game to get maximum legislative seats. It was a promise made by a man who was searching for God everywhere. Gandhiji believed that the root of real democracy was to be found in the unity of souls. Moreover, he had reached this decision after several days of anguish and after hearing his 'inner voice'. And so he considered this fast as a vow and gave it a religious and spiritual importance.

The day for the fast arrived.

Gandhiji got up at 2.30 a.m. and remembered Poet Rabindranath who was at the other end of India. Truth turned to beauty for auspiciousness.

"Dear Gurudev,

This is early morning 3 o'clock of Tuesday. I enter the fiery gate at noon. If you can bless the effort I want it. You have been to me a true friend because you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud. . . . I will yet prize the criticism, if your heart condemns my action. I am not too proud to make an open confession of my blunder, whatever the cost of the confession, if I find myself in error. If your heart approves of the action I want your blessing. It will sustain me. . . .

M. K. Gandhi

P. S

Just as I was handing this to the Superintendent, I got your loving and magnificent wire. . . ."¹²

Mahadev's diary has preserved the Poet's telegram.

"IT IS WORTH SACRIFICING PRECIOUS LIFE FOR THE SAKE OF INDIA'S UNITY AND HER SOCIAL INTEGRITY. THOUGH WE CANNOT ANTICIPATE WHAT EFFECT IT MAY HAVE UPON OUR RULERS WHO MAY NOT UNDERSTAND ITS IMMENSE IMPORTANCE FOR OUR PEOPLE, WE FEEL CERTAIN THAT THE SUPREME APPEAL OF SUCH SELF-SUFFERING TO THE CONSCIENCE OF OUR OWN COUNTRYMEN WILL NOT BE IN VAIN. I FERVENTLY HOPE THAT WE WILL NOT CALLOUSLY ALLOW SUCH NATIONAL TRAGEDY TO REACH ITS EXTREME LENGTH. OUR SORROWING HEARTS WILL FOLLOW YOUR SUBLIME PENANCE WITH REVERENCE AND LOVE."

Mahadev continued the discussion about the fast even after it commenced, it is possible that his motive in so doing must have been to bring to light the real significance of the fast to the world.

I: You are asking for *shuddhi* from the Hindu Society But is it not perverse obstinacy to expect it within seven days ?

Bapu No, I am not expecting it within seven days. What I am asking for within seven days is indeed not much. And what harm is there if my fast has to be extended ? Let there be as much agitation as possible if it is extended. What of it if MacDonald does not listen ? God is doing everything and is making things happen; should we not rather dance at his sport than get annoyed ? He has crossed the limits by saying, 'I am the gambling game of the gambler and the fraud of the fraudulent' Why should we worry if I lose my life when I know Him ? He is the perpetrator of fraud as well as He is the one to make me fast.

Vallabhbhai said, "You are full of anger Do not start your fast, or ask anyone else to fast while you harbour that anger Tell everyone, that this game can be played only by one who does not have an iota of anger No one else has the right to take a vow to fast."

"But why should there be fear of death ? We must be free of the allurements of preserving my body I very much like the Japanese method of Harakiri Why did Arabs of Morocco rush into the mouth of French Cannons ? Were they committing suicide ?"

I asked, "This order is of no value. But the more permanent thing is the elimination of untouchability. Suppose the destruction of untouchability is clearly seen and yet those useless people do not alter the order, will you still not give up your fast ?"

Bapu : I shall certainly give it up But this question should not be asked. The destruction of untouchability would be a greater miracle than the reversal of the order. But the answer cannot be made public Because it will affect the people wrongly. It has to be understood.

Gandhiji did not feel any fatigue at night. He spun 28 yards yarn.⁴

On the first day Gandhiji wrote and dictated a number of letters and telegrams; some selected excerpts are given below :

To Miraben, "As I wrote that first letter conveying my vow, I thought of you and of Ba. And for a time I became giddy. How would you two bear the thing ? But the voice within said, 'If you enter in, you must give up thought of all attachment' " And the letter went "No anguish will be too terrible to wash out the sin of untouchability. If it is any comfort, know that Vallabhbhai, Mahadev, Ramdas, Surendra,

Devdas, whom I have met, are bearing the thing wonderfully well. . . .'¹⁵

A telegram to Horace Alexander :

HOW SHALL I DISOBEY WHAT IS TO ME GOD'S COMMAND. LET HIS WILL PREVAIL. LOVE."¹⁶

Letter to P. N. Rajbhoj, a leader of the untouchables .

"My position is this . My fast has reference only to separate electorate. As soon as that is withdrawn the letter of the vow will be satisfied and I would be bound to call off the fast . But a very heavy responsibility will then lie upon me of having a substitute that is infinitely superior to separate electorate.

"If you will not resent my saying it, I would like to say that as I am a 'touchable' by birth, I am an untouchable by choice . And it was in this dual capacity that I wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare and then the Prime Minister. It is that dual capacity that has compelled the fast. Looking at the matter in this light I must say that I am not in love with the idea of statutory reservation . While it is not open to the same objection that separate electorate is, I have not a shadow of a doubt that it will prevent the natural growth of the suppressed classes and will remove the incentive to honourable amends from the suppressors. What I am aiming at is a heart-understanding between the two, the greatest opportunity of repentance and reparation on the part of the suppressors. I am certain that the moment is ripe for the change of heart among them. I would therefore favour widest possible franchise for the suppressed and establish a convention between the two sections for securing proper election of representatives of the suppressed. I have drafted a rough tentative scheme which I handed to the friends and which I explained fully yesterday to my son Devdas. But to me this is not the largest, but it is the least part of the reform I want.

"Nothing will satisfy me till the last vestige of untouchability is gone. I would therefore insist on a statutory declaration that all public places of worship, wells, schools, etc., should be open to the suppressed, precisely on the same terms as the suppressors . This is roughly my idea . If, however, the representatives of suppressed classes will not consider my idea, they are at liberty to have statutory reservation of seats. I should not fast against it, but you will not expect me to bless any such scheme. If I get the opportunity, I should certainly try to create public opinion among the suppressed against statutory reservation.

"If my position is not clear or satisfactory, I would be delighted to meet you and other friends including Dr. R. B. Raja and Dr. Ambedkar by appointment. As you are aware this has become possible only now."¹⁷

Only for that day he was allowed to meet the press representatives. In the published report of that interview, *The Times of India* had stated that Gandhiji had given voice to a willing acceptance of untouchability and had desired to sacrifice his life in this service, not as one of the upper class untouchables, but as one of those lowliest untouchables whom people do not consider fit enough even to be seen or approached. When asked whether he had talked to his son about cremation or not, Gandhiji said: "I have asked my son to say in my name at the Bombay Conference that he as his father's son was prepared to forfeit his father's life rather than see any injury being done to the suppressed classes in mad haste."¹⁸

On the previous day when Ambedkar's angry statement about the fast was being read, Gandhiji said, "I do not at all feel angry. He has a right to say all that. I deserve all that he and the other untouchables are doing out of anger. We all deserve it."¹⁹

In the morning, when there were still some hours before the fast could begin, Mahadev bitterly wept before beginning the reading of the Gita. The only feeling he had was, "Who am I, a cunning rogue, and a lustful person to recite the Gita at the commencement of Gandhiji's fast!"²⁰

The leaders of the country started discussions about the situation created on account of Gandhiji's fast. Gandhiji talked at length and tried to explain to some people such as Rajaji and Rajenbabu who were going to jail, these discussions that the leaders should formulate a time-table and take a decision within a specified time-limit. Once the decision is taken nothing should come in the way of its implementations; they should give up flattering Ambedkar; if he did not relent, the rest should immediately draft a resolution and ask the Prime Minister to rescind his previous order after having advised him telegraphically that the resolution was passed by a majority. This demand should be conveyed to him by several groups all over the country.²

The discussion that the leaders had with Ambedkar and others was mainly on the point as to the possible alternative to separate electorate. The suggestion was that for those seats that were reserved for the Harijans, initially for every seat, only the Harijan voters should elect the particular Harijan candidates. This would be a separate primary election. The joint electorate should elect representatives only from those elected in the primary elections. For every seat, there should be elected primarily a panel of three, four or

five candidates. The point that the Harijan voters, in their separate primary election should elect three, four or five candidates was a matter of argument. Amedkar said it should be three, others said five. At the end, the number of four was arrived at as a compromise.

The next issue was that this kind of double election should apply only to the seats over and above those decided in the Government Order, those arrived at during the compromise. The election for the number of seats mentioned in the order would be managed directly through the joint electorates. Ambedkar was ready to accept this, but Gandhiji, who had become a Harijan of his own accord, had an objection to this that if the system of dual election was introduced it should be for all seats.²²

Ambedkar and his three colleagues came to meet Gandhiji on the evening of the 22nd. Mahadev had filled many pages of his diary noting down their talks. We may see some of it as a gist:

Ambedkar. "We must accept that in the country there are two groups belonging to two different ideologies and act accordingly, and I should get my compensation . . . The decision of the Government gives me seventy-one seats and I feel that is a just, reasonable and definite allocation." 'According to you,' said Bapu "Over and above that I get the right to vote and contest elections in the general constituencies, I also get a franchise in the labour constituencies. We do realise that you are of immense help to us," said Ambedkar. 'Not to you personally,' Bapu said. "But I have only one quarrel with you, that is, you work for the so-called national welfare and not for our interests alone. If you devoted yourself entirely for our welfare, you would then become our hero," Ambedkar complained. 'Very sweet of you to say so,' Bapu said. "I want political power for my community. That is indispensable for our survival. The basis of the agreement therefore should be: I should get what is due to me. I wish to tell the Hindus that I should be assured of my compensation. . . ." ²³ Ambedkar added

Bapu: You have clarified your position beautifully. However, I should like to ask you one question . . . if I accept the primary election, the letter of my vow is not violated. I therefore accept that Clause but I would most certainly have to scrutinize its wording. . . . I suspect something when you insist that the panel should consist only of three candidates. It does not give me sufficient place to turn in. . . . I have to safeguard without any discrimination not the interest of one group alone but the Depressed Class as a whole. I want to serve the untouchables. That is why I am not at all angry with you . . .

When you use derogatory and angry words for me, I tell myself that I deserved that. I will not get angry even if you spit on my face I say this with God as witness. I know that you have drunk deep of the poisoned cup. However, I make a claim which will seem astounding to you. You are born an untouchable, but I am an untouchable by adoption. As a new convert I feel more for the welfare of the community than those who are already there . . . I learnt the lesson of democracy at the tender age of twelve. I quarrelled with my mother for treating the domestic sweeper as an untouchable That day I saw God in the form of a *bhangi*. You spoke the truth when you said that the welfare of the untouchables is dearer to you than my own life. Now be honest and stand by it. You should not care for my life. But do not be false to Harijans. . . . Without eradicating untouchability, root and branch, the honour of Hindus cannot be saved That can only happen when untouchables are treated on par with caste Hindus in every respect. A person who is regarded as 'unseeable' today should also have the opportunity to become the Viceroy of India I had said, in the first political speech I made on coming to India that I would like to make a *bhangi* the President of the Congress . . . About other issues you should put the Hindu Community on its honour . . . I know that the country will be ruined if I swerve from the stand I have taken."⁴

The Committee that was to bring Ambedkar at 4 p.m. on the 23rd, came, after we waited for it, at 9 30 p.m. The difference of opinion that day was on the point of a people's vote. Whilst other members of the Committee wished that the right to vote for the Constitution should be given to the people every five years, Ambedkar and his group insisted on a period of ten years.

Ambedkar explained his point of view: "We want to keep a section for punishing the Hindus that if they do not remove our disabilities, we could ask for a Harijan referendum; what objection could you have for such a referendum? You had accepted that even for the Muslims!" Gandhiji said, "You must be able to find out in the course of an year whether the Hindus are behaving properly with you or not . . . Either you put us on our honour or you don't . . . but that you are talking of a longer period indicates that you have reservations in your mind. . . . If my utter truthfulness has any effect on you I tell you to put us on our honour" Ambedkar did not have any reply to this. He got up saying, "We shall come to-morrow."²⁵

* * *

During the talks Gandhiji got a bit angry with Devdas. Mahadev explained to him that that anger was without any reason. So Gandhiji called Devdas. Father and son wept a lot together! After quieting down Gandhiji said, "How could I get angry during this religious vow? You would forgive me, but how would God do so?"²⁶

* * *

The discussions continued on the 24th. A difficult situation arose when Gandhiji said, "This is final. Referendum after five years, or my life." Some of Gandhiji's comrades wept.

Devdas and others came after two hours of discussions and reported that in spite of Ambedkar's best efforts the Depressed Class Party did not accept the period of five years. At last Birla found a way out by saying that the entire practice must automatically be stopped after ten years, during which period both the parties may get and find another option. Gandhiji was happy at this.

The document was signed. As Ambedkar came to Gandhiji, Thakkar Bapa said, "Ambedkar has changed."

Gandhiji said, "That is what you say, but Ambedkar does not!"

Ambedkar "Yes, Mahatmaji, the change has taken place. You have been of great help. You have tried to understand me more than your people tried to make me understand. I feel that there is more similarity in both of us than in them." Every one laughed uproariously. Gandhiji said, "Yes, of course."

In those very days Bapu had said, "Am I not also one kind of Ambedkar? Where a passionate insistence is concerned!"²⁷

The Government finally ratified the conditions of consent on what became the last day of the fast. The rumour that the Government had given its consent was heard in Poona since ten o'clock in the morning. But the authorised document which was like nourishment to the Mahatma who was at death's door, came as late as four in the evening.

Gurudev Rabindranath had arrived in the morning. He had explained in his unique style greatness of this vow to the Ashranutes at Shantiniketan and the villagers when he was there. Excerpts from it can be useful to explain the importance of this sacrifice. They are given below:

"By divine grace men come to this world during every Yuga

"There is no end to misery these days. We have suffered so much of torment, wretchedness, innumerable diseases, grief and agony; mountains of misery have accumulated, but all that torment is pushed aside by today's joy. A great man has been

born on this matchless land of ours, on the land on which we live and on which we move about.

"We cannot properly recognise the great men when they come. Because our minds are afraid, unclean and our nature is lax, our application is weak. . . it is not easy to understand the erudite, meritorious and relentless ascetics. Because we cannot reconcile our knowledge, intelligence and training with theirs. But one thing is not difficult to grasp — and that is love. And so we have now understood the astonishing thing that has happened. The one who has come amidst us is very noble, very great and yet he has accepted us, we have known him and all have understood 'that he is our own'. There is no distinction of high and low in his affection; no distinction between the learned and the stupid, between the rich and the poor. He has given his love equally to all. He has said, let there be happiness for all, good fortune for all. He has not merely uttered words. He has taken trouble and said it. He had suffered innumerable torments and insults. The history of life is one of pain.

"The whole of India knows him. It is not known how but the whole of India has given him devotion. He has been given one epithet — Mahatma. The astonishing thing is — how was he recognised? . . . He is a Mahatma who made joys and sorrows of others his own, whose welfare lies in the welfare of others. He has a place in every one's heart, and every one has a place in his heart.

"We say that the foreigners have cultivated enmity towards us. But a greater enemy is within us. And that is our own deep rooted cowardice. The Creator has sent us the strength, through his life, to overcome that cowardice. He has come to take away our fear through his fearlessness. . . When a human being insults another human being, his God turns away from him at that time. Since centuries we have filled the veins of Bharatvarsha with the poison of disrespect for human beings. We have burdened hundreds of heads with the unbearable burden of lowliness. The whole country is weak and fatigued because of that burden. And we cannot stand erect because of that sin. One brother casts that stigma on another brother with his own hands. The Mahatma cannot tolerate that sin. . .

"This curse has been on the country for a long time. One person has come to atone for it. He has mastered all fear. He has conquered the fear of death. Let us not have any fear. Fear of people, fear of society, we should not be affected by anything. We should walk in his path and let him not be defeated.

"May that Ascetic be victorious. He who is standing before death, with God in his heart and having ignited the flame of love for all. You sing for his victory. May your voice reach his seat. Say, we receive you, we accept your truth.

"What can I say? My language does not have strength. The language that he speaks is not to be heard only through the ears, but is to be heard internally. It is the ultimate language of man. It must have reached your heart.

"When others become your own, it is our greatest good luck. The greatest calamity is when ours become aliens. Call those deliberately, whom you have lost knowingly. Let offences die, ill-luck be removed. Let us imbibe the right of manhood with dignity, by bestowing dignity on men. . . ."²⁸

When the Poet came to Yeravda Mandir from Shantiniketan on hearing about Gandhiji's fast, his heart was filled with these emotions. But at the time of describing the completion of the vow of the fast unto death, his speech had the restraint worthy of ascetics. That report expressed in the Poet's inimitable style supports the report in Mahadev's diary. And so we quote it here concisely :

"Poona's hilly tract is charming. On reaching the gate we saw a number of military parades — with armoured car and machine guns. Our car came and stopped near the majestic bungalow of Vitthaladas Thackersey. His widow welcomed us with a soft smile and took us inside. Girl students from her Vidyalaya welcomed us with a song from both sides of the steps.

"Immediately on entering the room we found the atmosphere charged with apprehension. All the faces were clouded with worry. On inquiry we learnt that Mahatmaji's condition was serious. Till then there was no news from England. I sent an urgent telegram to the Prime Minister.

"It was necessary to send that telegram. Within a short time we heard the rumour that the consent from England had arrived. But the proof of the truth or the falsehood of the rumour was received many hours later.

"Today it was Mahatmaji's day of silence. He was going to speak at 1 p.m. He wished that I should be by his side at that time. Our car was stopped on the road to Yeravda jail. The British soldier said that no car was allowed to proceed further. I thought that at least the road to the jail will be open in India. A crowd of all kinds of people collected round the car.

"Some one from us advanced a little to get permission from the jail authorities and there came Devdas with the

permission for entering the jail. Later on we heard that Mahatmaji had sent him. Because Mahatmaji suddenly felt that my car might have been stopped by the police — though he actually did not know anything about it.

"The iron gates opened one after another and closed. We could see in front the audaciously high wall, the imprisoned sky — roads built in a row, a couple of trees. . . .

"We entered a courtyard closed in by a wall after climbing some steps and entering a door. There were two rows of buildings at quite a distance. Mahatmaji was lying down in the shades of a larger mango tree in the courtyard.

"Mahatmaji pulled me close to himself by holding on to my two hands and embraced me for a long time and said: 'What a pleasure!'

"As I was the harbinger of good news, I praised my good fortune to him. It was then 1-30 p.m. The news from England had spread through the entire nation. Later on we heard that politicians at that time were holding discussions in the Council at Simla. The press people had also known the news. Only there did not seem to be the urgency required to save the life of one whose stream of life was flowing near to the boundary of death. It was indeed surprising to note the extremely heartless, complicated and lengthy red-tape. Every moment anxiety increased till 4-15 p.m. I heard that the news had already been received at Poona at ten in the morning.

"There were friends all around. My attention was drawn to Mahadev, Vallabhbhai, Rajagopalachari, Rajendraprasad. I also saw Kasturba and Sarojini. Jawaharlal's wife, Kamala, was also there.

"Mahatmaji's normally thin body had become terribly emaciated. His voice could hardly be heard. He was being given water with a little soda intermittently as acid had collected in his stomach. The responsibility of the doctors had reached its extreme.

"And yet his mental power had not diminished a bit. His thoughts were constantly flowing like a stream, he was still bubbling with vitality. He had been relentlessly involved in some difficult thoughts and complicated discussions immediately before the commencement of his fast unto death. His mind had to put up with harsh blows, treachery and their reactions because of the correspondence with the politicians abroad. Every one knew that the forceful demands of various parties during the fast did not show any consideration for his condition. But there was no sign at all of mental fatigue. The

natural lustrous purity of his thought had not been dimmed. It was indeed surprising to see this invincible functioning of the soul in the midst of this painful penance of the body. Had I not come, I would never have realised the extreme strength harboured in this lean-bodied man.

"Today the voice of this great soul who is lying on the altar of death has reached thousands of people of Bharatvarsha. No obstruction could stop him. Obstruction of distance, of brick, wood or stone, of adverse politics, of inertia of centuries, all of them were vanquished.

"Mahadev said that Mahatmaji was eagerly waiting for me. I do not have enough knowledge to analyse the puzzle troubling the nation, by my presence. My pleasure was to have given him satisfaction.

"We moved to the sides so that he may not be troubled by the crowding. We waited a long time for the news. The sunlight came down on to the wall. A few white khadi-clad men and women were quietly talking here and there.

"These people in the prison are worth watching. There is no laxity, due to fatigue, evident in their behaviour. Strength of character gives rise to confidence. And that is why the jail authorities trust them and allow them to meet each other with full freedom. They have never taken advantage by going against the promise they gave to Mahatmaji. They have developed firmness because of self-restraint and the quality of steadiness. At the first glance it can be seen that they are the fit people for the penance for India's freedom.

"At last the prison officials came with the official pronouncement with the Government's seal. I felt that they were also pleased. Mahatmaji started reading it slowly. I told Sarojini that all those around him must get back. Mahatmaji called the friends. After having read the letter I heard that he said that it should be read and considered, and added on his own behalf that the letter should be shown to Dr. Ambedkar. He would be satisfied only if Dr. Ambedkar supported it.

"To analyse the matter of the letter and to read it out to Mahatmaji was entrusted to Pandit Hridaynath Kunzru. No doubt remained in Mahatmaji's mind as Pandit Kunzru gave a clear and detailed interpretation of the matter. The vow of the fast unto death ended with due ceremony.

"Mahatmaji's bed was shifted to the wall in the shade. All others spread the jail rugs and sat around him. Kamala Nehru brought the orange juice. The Inspector General of Prisons, who had brought the official letter requested that Kasturba

should give the orange juice to Mahatmajī with her own hands. Mahadev said that the song from *Geetanjali's* 'जीवन जोखान सूकाय जाय' is Gandhiji's favourite. I had forgotten the tune I set a temporary tune and sang it. Pandit Shyama Shastri recited from the Vedas. Then Mahatmajī sipped the juice, slowly, held up to him by Kasturba. Lastly, the Ashramites of Sabarmati and all others sang 'Vaishnavajana'. Fruits and sweets were distributed. Every one accepted them.

"A great occasion of my joy in the jail. Nothing like this had ever happened before. A sacrifice of the consecration of a life took place in the jail. It achieved success in this very place. This man, a manifestation of sudden meeting was indeed 'born out of a sacrifice'."²⁹

FOOTNOTES.

1. CWMG - 48, p. 298
2. Ibid - 51 - p. 50
3. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2 p. 25 (Guj.)
4. Ibid, p. 38 (Guj.)
5. CWMG - 51, pp. 70-71
6. Ibid, p. 455
7. Ibid, pp. 78-79
8. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, p. 45 (Guj.)
9. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 292 (Guj.)
10. Ibid., p. 293 (Guj.)
11. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, p. 63 (Guj.)
12. CWMG - 51, p. 101
13. Ibid, p. 109
14. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, pp. 62-63 (Guj.)
15. CWMG - 51, pp. 103-104
16. Ibid, p. 103
17. Ibid, p. 111
18. Ibid, p. 118
19. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, p. 64 (Guj.)
20. Ibid, p. 65 (Guj.)
21. Ibid, pp. 68-69 (Guj.)
22. Ibid, p. 70, Foot-Note (Guj.)
23. Ibid, pp. 69-70 selected (Guj.), CWMG - 51, Appendix-B, p. 459
24. Ibid, pp. 70-73 selected
25. Ibid, pp. 74-75 selected
26. Ibid, pp. 75-76
27. Ibid, pp. 80-81
28. *Ravindra Rachanavali*, Part-11, pp. 458 to 461 selected.
29. Ibid, pp. 461 to 464 selected

CHAPTER XXXV

FROM YERAVDA MANDIR TO HINDALGA'S GITA MANDIR

Recognising that unity is a prerequisite for winning freedom, Gandhiji consistently tried to achieve that unity even while in jail. He therefore gave prime importance to the removal of untouchability.

The British rulers became restless when they saw the awakening in the country caused by Gandhiji's fast for only six days. They launched a counter-attack on this awakening to prevent it from developing. The prison gates of Yeravda had been widely opened during the days of the fast. Hundreds of people were present on the day when the fast was broken. There were people from various groups, from national leaders to ordinary volunteers. There were people who had come from the farthest corners of India. Satyagrahi soldiers imprisoned in Yeravda were also present. Along with them all were the other non-political prisoners, jail officials and their families.

To remind everyone that Gandhiji was still a prisoner, Major Bhandari got an order from His Majesty's Government to restrict everything including interviews from the 29th. This was done only three days after the Yeravda Pact and the breaking of the fast! Gandhiji was annoyed at this. He immediately dictated a stiff letter against the prohibitory order. His opinion was that there should have been a freedom to meet and correspond with people regarding removal of untouchability for which the Yeravda Pact was signed. Malaviyaji had come, met him and gone back. He was going to come back to visit Gandhiji but could not do so. Sarojini Naidu and Urmiladevi Sen came upto the gate and had to go back. Jaykar and others wanted to find out if there was any possibility of a compromise regarding the movement but the prison-gates clanged

shut in their faces. Willingdon, who believed Gandhiji to be a wily *Bania*, wanted to show off his power. Gandhiji said, "Simla cannot change. It is futile to hope for the situation to change while the people there are not replaced by others."¹

In the evening it was Kasturba's turn to go. Mahadev said, "It was very painful that Ba had to go in the evening." Bapu said to Ba, "Now you better go soon, do not make the Jailer wait."

Ba wanted to go after preparing the day's last meal for Bapu. At last she prepared to go. She said to Bapu, 'Right now, I am going. Take care', and whilst saying so her eyes misted over.

Bapu lightly patted her cheek and said, "You do not have to worry whether I would come or you would. Was it not enough that we could be together for so many days?"²

The work of the removal of untouchability had begun and become enlivened because of Gandhiji's fast.

The saintly Appasaheb Patwardhan had started scavenging on his own initiative in one of the jails in Maharashtra. A leading worker of Kerala, K. Kelappan had started a fast to get the temple of Guruvayur thrown open to the Harijans.

Gandhiji sent a telegram to Kelappan - "SUSPEND THE FAST AND GIVE FROM THE DATE OF SUSPENSION THREE CLEAR MONTHS NOTICE." If no compromise was reached within three months, Gandhiji was ready to support him. Mahadev raised a doubt about its being a question of Kelappan's inner voice. Gandhiji replied

"He is asking me, asking for my blessings, that itself indicates that it is not a matter of his inner voice but that he is acting according to my opinion. . . . Kelappan is a disciplinarian. The work will not suffer. If after three months, Kelappan has the strength, he will do it. Suppose he cannot do it. I certainly am there."³

Mahadev presented in brief the method of Satyagraha for temple entry for Harijans explained by Gandhiji to Uma Nehru, "Either get the temples opened or get them boycotted; when no one goes there, they would get tired."⁴

Ambedkar was given permission by the Government to meet Gandhiji freely at any time and hold discussions with him. Basically, Ambedkar had asked for an 'interview without any interference'. And he had got the permission according to what was 'written in his telegram'. But when he came for the interview, both Gandhiji and Ambedkar were told to discuss only about untouchability. They were told that this order was the outcome of a discussion with Lord Willingdon. Ambedkar accepted helplessly but confessed, "I had not come to discuss untouchability, but political matters."

Bapu said, "That is true. I cannot talk about it with you; even if you do I shall not be able to express an opinion — my mind does not work in that direction."⁵

In October, on reading the obituary in the newspaper of Lavangika, daughter of the erudite scholar Narasinharao Divetia, Mahadev drew Gandhiji's attention to it. Gandhiji immediately wrote a letter :

"All of us were pained to read about your daughter's death. Mahadev told me that she was the only one left to you. I need not offer my condolences to you. Both of you possess true knowledge. May God grant you peace."⁶

These few sentences had a miraculous effect on Narasinharao.

Between 1932 to 1934, Gandhiji had to think about a fast, a number of times. That is why Mahadev's diaries of those days, parts one and two, seem to be under the deep shadows of the fasts. After the fast of September 1932 ended, Gandhiji acquired some special facilities to work for the removal of untouchability even while in jail. He was allowed to correspond and give statements to the press regarding this subject. To fulfil the purpose of this programme he started the periodicals, *Harijan* in English, *Harijan Bandhu* in Gujarati and *Harijan Sevak* in Hindi, in February and March 1933. The Anti-untouchability League, started in September 1932 was later named Harijan Sevak Sangh. Birla was appointed the President.

During this period, Gandhiji undertook two more fasts with serious consequences to his health. He heard about some weaknesses displayed by his workers in May 1933. He undertook a twenty-one days' self-purification fast to atone for the mistake of the workers for which he blamed himself. He was released immediately on the commencement of his fast. Gandhiji continued and ended the fast in "Parnakuti", Lady Premila Thackersey's bungalow at Poona. Then when he announced a march from Sabarmati to Rasse, he was arrested on the previous night of the march along with his thirty-three comrades. Gandhiji and Mahadev were taken to Yeravda after being kept for few hours at Sabarmati jail and then were released with a prohibitory order about entering the limits of Yeravda. But they were arrested immediately on their breaking the prohibitory orders and were sentenced to one year's imprisonment after an immediate trial. Gandhiji had expected to get the permission to do the work of removal of untouchability from the jail as before; but as he did not get it in the jail he went on a fast, without fixing its period, from 16th August 1933. This time the Government's attitude was rather stiff and there were indications that they would try the experiment of feeding Bapu forcibly. He was removed to the hospital from the jail.

He gave away all his personal belongings to the nurses at the hospital, in the belief that he might not live long.

It was through the untiring efforts of Gandhiji's very intimate friend, Charlie Andrews that he was released at this juncture. That very day he ended his fast in "Parnakuti" at Poona.

In the first few days of the fast undertaken in the month of May 1933, Mahadev got separated from Gandhiji and remained in jail. But fortunately the term of his sentence was over and he went to Gandhiji immediately on being released. Bapu sent him to the Sabarmati Ashram after two days. He stayed there for two days and returned to Gandhiji. Mahadev wrote ten articles regarding this fast. These articles are the evidence of how his devoted heart was influenced by the fast.

Gandhiji had asked Sardar to read the statement to be given before the fast against separate electorates, but had told him not to give his opinion immediately. Sardar read the statement twice and about half an hour later told Mahadev :

"Have you anyone purer than him ? Who knows whether God wants to let him stay or take him away ? But we must follow in complete silence of mind, speech and body, the direction of the course of his mind and soul."

Once Shastri wrote a letter to Gandhiji discussing his fast. With reference to that Vallabhbhai said :

"After reading Shastri's letter, one gets a feeling that it was good that the fasts were undertaken. People like Shastri are hardly ever going to bring about reforms in religion. The horrible clouds of darkness can only be dispersed by some one like Bapu who can wield a powerful weapon like the fast."

It was mainly Vallabhbhai's job to keep track of the news outside, to be collected through the newspapers, correspondence, and through those who came for interviews. In between he used to pass subtle sarcastic remarks about the news in his dynamic style and in choice language. On reading, that the Government had put the confiscated building of the Bardoli Ashram on the market for sale, the Sardar said,

"It will be good if they are sold. They will have no other alternative but to return them to us, once we are in power. And till we get the power, aren't we in possession of their buildings (jails) ?"

During this period, Gandhiji, Sardar and Mahadev spent most of their time in correspondence and interviews in relation to the removal of untouchability. Other questions were also discussed occasionally. Bapu had infinite patience about correspondence. Once Ranchhoddas Patwari posed 88 questions in his letter. Gandhiji

dictated to Mahadev an answer to every question with care. Mahadev was not allowed by the jail authorities to write freely; so Gandhiji often dictated letters even to Mahadev's acquaintances saying: "You will only be able to see Mahadev's handwriting, not his letters."

Mathuradas Trikamji, Gandhiji's nephew came for an interview. He informed them that Devdas was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for opposing a prohibitory order against his entering Delhi. He talked about Jawaharlal. Why was he (Jawahar) against Harijan work? He said that Bapu could no longer be considered a prisoner when he was doing this work. . . . Why is it so?

Bapu said:

"The explanation for this is that he has not understood the inner meaning of this work, nor of Satyagraha. . . . Today we are practising Satyagraha to obtain power whereas Satyagraha is supposed to remove power. Power means violence. An army is needed to maintain power. The root of Satyagraha is to renounce power. Satyagrahis will be able to clean up the Councils and other such bodies only if they keep away from it. Motilalji did not like my eleven points; neither did Jawahar. But I am firm about those points. . . ."¹⁸

Mahadev asked, "Then it can be said that you accept *Surajya* in place of *Swarajya*." Gandhiji replied, "No, Campbell Bannerman's *Surajya* is one which goes in for welfare through patronage. It cannot replace *Swarajya*. But the one we have with us of the eleven points is the real welfare state and that is *Swarajya*. . . . I can still explain it in greater detail. But does this occasion demand it? If the occasion arises I shall again turn the nation towards those eleven points. . . ."

The next day Mahadev continued the discussion. Gandhiji clarified:

"Satyagraha can never be for gaining power, it is to keep power unsullied, to use power wisely, . . . non-violence can never be used for violence.

"Satyagraha must be aimed at a specific thing which means, not to attain power but to prove specific principles. . . . A weak administration cannot last in face of it; it will break down, and so the administration will automatically improve. And yet we must remain aloof when the question of the introduction of power in the administration arises. We must enjoy by giving up! We must vote, we may use the power of giving vote, but that too to elect Rama in the election between Rama and Ravana. Even Rama will be practising violence to

the extent to which he rules Ours must be a Satyagraha contingent which would exist only to keep power on its proper course¹¹⁹

Narayan had come from Sabarmati to stay for a few days with Mahadev during the twenty-one days' fast. Unfortunately, he was struck down by malaria immediately on his arrival at Poona. Mahadev was already worried due to Gandhiji's fast to which was added the anxiety about Babla's (Narayan's) sickness. The temperature touched 106° and did not decrease for 36 hours. Mahadev removed his office from near Gandhiji's bed and arranged it near Babla's bed. With one hand he went on scribbling replies to the innumerable letters and telegrams addressed to Gandhiji, and with the other applied cold packs to Babla's forehead. Even in delirium Babla was asking for his mother. Mahadev had not sent for Durgaben, thinking it was not necessary, as he expected the temperature to come down in a day or so. But he could not bear to see Babla's suffering and off and on felt choked with emotion. Harilal's daughter, Manuben, by chance saw Mahadev drying his tears. She told Kasturba and Kasturba told Gandhiji. Gandhiji immediately sent for Mahadev. As soon as he was with him Gandhiji started dictating a telegram asking Durga to come to Poona. Mahadev started arguing with him that it was only malaria and it would come down within a day or so. Durga need not come but Gandhiji interrupted him and said, "I have not sent for you for advice, but to dictate a telegram." Of course Babla's temperature was normal by the time Durgaben arrived, nevertheless, it was obvious that her arrival was a great comfort to Mahadev.

The entire nation felt relieved when Gandhiji's fast ended without any untoward incident. Vallabhbhai wrote a letter to Mahadev from Yeravda Mandir:

"At last God did not let us down. This nation has committed many sins, but it must have desisted from sin at some point of time, for which we have come out unscathed out of this ordeal. God has rewarded Premliaben for her untiring service. She has got the credit she well deserved. Really God is extremely compassionate. Otherwise, we are not worthy. Today all are shedding tears of joy. We are thankful to God."¹

Within few days after the fast ended, Devdas Gandhi married Laxmi Rajagopalachari. Gandhiji and Rajaji became related to each other through their children's marriage. Every one was very happy at this marriage as it was finalised and celebrated after Devdas and Laxmi had practised restraint by staying apart, for a number of years after they had decided to marry. Mahadev's joy was mirrored on his

face. To him it was almost the marriage of his own younger brother And that too with the daughter of a man whom he had discovered and introduced to Gandhiji fourteen years ago.

Gandhiji was mentally planning during the fast to put the Ashram through another test. For this purpose he sent Mahadev immediately on his release from jail. Gandhiji felt that the torch of consecutive fasts must be kept alight. He also wanted to know how many persons from the Ashram were ready for such a penance. He also wanted the Ashram to pass through a stiffer test than usual.

The news spread amongst the Ashram children that not only the fathers but the mothers would also be sent to jail. There were only three children younger than Babla at that time. They were Gulam Rasool Qureshi's children. From the rest, some of them were his age and a few older to him. It was decided to keep the Ashram children in the Harijan Girl's Hostel managed by Ansuyaben Sarabhai. The task of leaving the children at the hostel which was at Mirzapur Road, fell to Mahadev's lot. A detailed account has been given in this author's book titled *Sant Sevtan Sukrut Vadhe* "Mahadev has described it thus "I handed over the children to Ansuyaben. My eyes became moist when I was leaving them. Ansuyaben also wept a lot and bowed down to me."

Vanmala Desai, one of these children, has given a very touching description :

"Bapu entrusted Mahadevkaka with the task of taking us to the hostel. We had all gathered together under the well-shaded and dearly loved tamarind tree on the Ashram Road. We did not know anything about our future. We had no idea when we would meet again. Our parents were weeping. We were also weeping. But Mahadevkaka was sobbing uncontrollably. It was pathetic to separate small children from the parents. For Mahadevkaka who had a soft and tender heart, it was just unbearable. We all got into the car and it seemed as if the car started with a cry.

"On reaching Ansuyaben's place, at the time of parting, we clung to Mahadevkaka and we would not leave him. He hardened his heart and left us there and returned. Next morning Ba, Bapuji and all Ashramites were arrested. So we did not have a chance to meet them."¹²

The Government's plan was to arrest all those in the Ashram and Gandhiji's plan was that even if one Ashramite was left out, he should march to the Rass Village. Next day, that is on 1st August, the entire Ashram was empty.

The previous night, a posse of police came at 1.20 and arrested Gandhiji, Kasturba and Mahadev. Mahadev told Kakasaheb's Bal, as

he went down the steps of Sheth Ranchhoddas's bungalow. "You are not arrested. So you start marching tomorrow." But then it was known from the police that all the Ashramites also had been arrested so Gandhiji told the police that if they were arresting all those joining the march, Bal was one left out, and so the police arrested him too.

At the prison gates the Collector began taking statements. Gandhiji said, "I am not a destroyer of peace, I establish peace. And the objective of civil disobedience is ultimately to establish peace." Mahadev said, "The nation is beset with a disease which is fear. It is my pledge to practise and propagate civil disobedience to counteract fear and attain *Swarajya*."

Both of them slept in a yard of Sabarmati jail at about 2-30 a.m. Only two cots were put there as a preparation for their arrival.

Gandhiji said, "It was indeed a nice way to celebrate Tilak's death anniversary." The first thing that Gandhiji did was to ask permission for Harijan work. The Jail Superintendent, Advani, informed them that Kasturba and Miraben were kept together.

Mahadev prepared soup from boiled white pumpkin. In the evening they sent the pumpkin to Kasturba. She prepared soup from it and sent it for Gandhiji. This was to be the last time Gandhiji was to take soup prepared by Kasturba for a long time to come; Advani came in the evening and said, "Our friendship is of a short duration. Better collect your luggage."

Gandhiji took a short nap before he was called to the gate.

Mahadev was feeling a bit upset as he had been angry with Durgaben for some reason on the previous day. And so during Gandhiji's nap, he apologised to Durgaben by writing her a letter and thanked God that there was no untoward incident.

A saloon was ready in the Sabarmati railway siding. It started as soon as Gandhiji and Mahadev stepped aboard.

In the morning they were asked to alight at Santa Cruz station and were taken to Poona by car. They saw the jail officials known to them near the Yeravda jail. No body was previously informed about their arrival. Both were pining to see Vallabhbhai in the yard. But neither Vallabhbhai nor Chhaganlal Joshi was there. The doors were sealed. The nest was there but the birds had flown. Later on it was learnt that Vallabhbhai was transferred to Nasik with an excuse that he may have to be operated upon and Joshi was in a 'Separate' cell.

Immediately on entering the jail, Gandhiji demanded that he should be allowed to do Harijan work, because it was almost his life.

Each was sentenced to one year's simple imprisonment. Mahadev said, "This is the advantage in coming with you. Simple imprisonment and no fine."

Kasturba, other fifteen women and sixteen men were awarded six months' imprisonment each. Durgaben and Premaben Katak were placed in 'B' class. Gandhiji laughed uproariously and said, "You have to be the secretary's wife to get a 'B' class."

This time in the Yeravda jail, the separation from Vallabhbhai rankled in the minds of Gandhiji and Mahadev. More than once Gandhiji mouthed a line of a song from the Bhartrihari — 'That wound will not heal through asceticism.'

Gandhiji was firm in his decision to go on a fast if he was not allowed to do Harijan work, to meet people, to write articles for the newly started *Harijan* periodicals or to meet their managers or editors and to get newspapers to follow developments. The Government's reply indicated that they did not believe that Gandhiji himself wanted to follow the rules. Actually, Gandhiji did not want to fast, but on reading the letter showing the Government's distrust he changed that decision. He thanked Mahadev for drawing his attention.¹³

Kasturba came to meet him on the fifth day of the fast. Here is the description of the meeting in Mahadev's words :

"Ba was the same. She might have oceans of sorrow in her mind, but her face was totally serene and peaceful. She bowed down to him and put her head on his chest. I had tears in my eyes. But she did not have a single tear in her eyes. She said with a smile, 'So, you have started it again.' When I was told by the Jailor and the Superintendent to come here, I had half a mind to refuse. But I thought it was not proper to refuse and so I did not refuse. Having come here, I took my bath and got ready to see you. The Superintendent said, 'As Gandhi is in the European yard, we do not have orders to keep you with him. I will take you to meet him for fifteen minutes.' I said, 'Then you should not have brought me here. Did I ask you to be taken to him?' Bapu was pleased and indicated his approval by holding his head."

"Bapu inquired about other women prisoners. Ba gave him the news about everyone. She talked about why Durga and Prema were kept together, why Prema asked for 'C' class, how she was put in the 'C' and once again brought to the 'B' class."¹⁴

It seemed as if Ba came and poured new life into Bapu, as if she added new blood, new hope and new confidence. Who can be defeated when confronted with such courage?

That very day orders came to remove Gandhiji to the hospital. Here is the later description in Mahadev's words :

"Katchi came And gave the news that an ambulance is being brought to take Bapu to the hospital We packed everything in half an hour.

"Let me drink the jail's soda at least once,' Bapu wrote and I filled up the glass.

"At last I said, 'You separated Vallabhbhai because of the first fast and for the second you are separating me.'

"He wrote, 'God is trying us in every way. Did today's *bhajan* not say the same thing? "Without extreme affliction, - who has realised Krishna?" Never be disconsolate Whatever comes at a given time, accept it with pleasure. Do not think of the next moment."

"I said, 'There is no question of sorrow I have to bear the separation, but it is all for your good. We never even dreamt that we will be kept together on the day we were arrested'

"He wrote 'Make the most of today, who knows about to-morrow?' - This is spoken by Chārvāk as well as by a devotee.'

"Last night I had remembered the *bhajan* 'Who has realised Krishna without extreme affliction?', I kept repeating it to myself, and this morning I sang it well. Wasn't it a pleasure that Bapu remembered it whilst going away?"

"In this way I was suddenly left alone Just as, God's ways are mysterious the Government's ways are also mysterious" "The next description is in Narahari's words:

"Bapu was taken to the Sasoon hospital from the Yeravda jail and Mahadev was transferred to the Belgaum jail. Bapu's health speedily deteriorated in the Sasoon hospital His 21 days' fast ended on 29th May and his last (that is for the third time) fast began on the 16th August Thus this last fast began when even three months had not elapsed after the previous fast of 21 days' duration And so there was a lot of physical suffering this time Especially on the two or three days before the 24th, the physical suffering was acute and troublesome Bapu had himself described in a letter after his release 'I had given up hope When I vomited on the 23rd night, I felt that I will not be able to last long. I will not be able to fight death. On the 24th afternoon I gave away my personal things.'

"After giving away his things to the nurses, and the ward boys, he instructed that nobody should call him and water to drink also should not be given. Ba was near him He even asked her to go, and closed his eyes and began repeating Ramanama. Ba was benumbed and just stood there

"At this very juncture Andrews, who was persuading the Governor of Bombay for the past three days to release Gandhiji, succeeded in his efforts and came dashing in a car to the hospital with the orders for his release. And took Ba and Bapu to 'Parnakuti'.

"When he slightly recovered, Bapu announced publicly that although the Government had released him, he would not participate directly in the civil disobedience movement till the 3rd August 1934, which marked the end of his sentence and would spend his time mainly in Harijan work. After that he started his historical Harijan tour and toured the whole country for the removal of untouchability and collecting funds for it."⁶

That tour began in November 1933 and continued till June 1934.

Gandhiji, after his release, wrote to Jawaharlal on the 3rd September, "Poor Mahadev is in Belgaum. It is good to go through the fire."⁷

Apparently the Hindalga jail of Belgaum did prove to be a testing ordeal for Mahadev. He was prevented from writing letters in Gujarati as the jail officials there did not know that language. Neither Durgaben nor Narayan understood English. So for months together he had no correspondence with his family. The cell in which he was kept was, as it were, meant for the punishment by solitary confinement. Since, the criminal prisoner who was his cell mate did not know any other language except Kanarese, Mahadev could not converse with him. Of course, even with that prisoner Mahadev had established a pleasant relationship, but there was hardly any conversation. Relatives were allowed interviews in jail, but Belgaum was so far away from Sabarmati that Durgaben and Narayan could meet him only twice during the entire term. When Mahadev was released in May 1934, he was barely forty-two years old, but his face had totally changed. Signs of old age were clearly visible. The few hairs on his head had turned grey. His jaw sagged on account of some teeth having fallen out. The wrinkles on his forehead had deepened.

In this jail it was the Gita which sustained him. He started translating Gandhiji's *Anāsaktiyoga* but whilst doing that he found it necessary to add some notes. Along with the actual translation he added his own notes, but at the same time he also added a whole new chapter titled 'My Submission' which was like a preface of the whole book and which was longer than the main text. In this preface he has made a comparative study of the thoughts of a number of other scholars. As he could not get the books of most of these other

scholars, he quoted their opinions from his memory. When these opinions were later compared with the original books, very few changes were necessary. After his release from jail, he gave his manuscript to Gandhiji to read through. He wanted to send the manuscript to the publishers only after his consent. But Gandhiji could not look through the manuscript for a very long time due to his various preoccupations. Ultimately, he completed that work nearly four years after Mahadev's death, that is in August 1946. In that book Gandhiji gave the entire history in his characteristically short preface.

"The following pages by Mahadev Desai are an ambitious project. It represents his unremitting labours during his prison-life in 1933-'34. Every page is evidence of his scholarship and exhaustive study of all he could lay hands upon regarding the Bhagvad Gita. . . . The immediate cause of this labour of love was my translation in Gujarati of the divine book as I understood it. In trying to give a translation of my meaning of the Gita, he found himself writing an original commentary on the Gita. . . . Frankly I do not pretend to any scholarship I have, therefore, contented myself with showing the genesis of Mahadev Desai's effort. In so far as the translation part of the volume is concerned, I can vouch for its accuracy. He has conveyed the meaning of the original translation." ¹⁵

After Gandhiji's release from jail due to sickness and when he started his tour for the removal of untouchability, Mahadev must have written a letter to him from Hindalga jail, describing some difficulty in his translating *Anāsaktiyoga*. The reply Gandhiji wrote on 23rd November 1933 during his Harijan tour, clarifies attitude towards his own Gujarati translation as well as the English translation that Mahadev had undertaken. Some excerpts are given from that letter. Gandhiji had shown his inability to spare the time to read the translation, the original, and to clarify about the *śloka* Mahadev had asked to be explained and he said :

" . . . That time I cannot give just now. Then there is the question — shall I help you much ? I fear, not. For what you say is quite true. I ought not to have yielded to Swami's demand for my own translation. . . . I realised my unfitness for the task as I was proceeding but I continued. The defects you have not noticed are there. How can I give what I have not—scholarship ? Want of good knowledge of Sanskrit was a great drawback. The remedy is clear. You should go on with your translation taking such help as my translation can give to bring out my thought but not always following my translation. Give

that rendering which is acceptable to you. . . Take up the Gujarati, correct the translation where it is defective and polish the language where it needs polishing. Rewrite and add notes where necessary. That will complete your task. Then when the whole result comes into my hands, I shall work on it and make such changes as I may deem fit in order to bring out my meaning. This I can do easily. We must then bring out a revised version of the Gujarati and publish your translation in English. So doing, you do not need to stop your work for want of my detailed reply to your comments. I shall circulate your comments among friends and get their opinion and let you have it all."²⁰

Gandhiji never got the time later on to read Mahadev's comments and write his comments on it. Mahadev had hoped to sit with Gandhiji and scrutinise the entire manuscript after his release from jail, but that never materialised. Just like Mahadev's diaries, even his *Gospel of Selfless Action, Or Gita According to Gandhi*, were published and became famous after his death.

According to the opinion of a number of Indian and foreign scholars, Mahadev's *Gita According to Gandhi* was the most important contribution next to his diaries. Jorgon Johonson, the present President of War Resister's International has said, "I wanted to understand the foundation of Gandhi I got that from the Gita given by Mahadev. I have read that book nine times and every time I have found something new to fascinate me."²¹

FOOTNOTES

1. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, p. 88 (Guj.)
2. *Ibid.* p. 89 (Guj.)
3. *Ibid.* p. 97 (Guj.); *CWMG* - 51, p. 150
4. *Ibid.* p. 88, (Guj.)
5. *CWMG* - 51, p. 462
6. *M. D.'s Diary* - 2, p. 146 (Guj.)
7. *Ibid.* - 3, p. 417 (Guj.)
8. *Ibid.* - 2, p. 371 (Guj.)
9. *Ibid.* - 3, pp. 342-43 selected (Guj.)
10. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-Patro* - 4, p. 227, Date - 29-5 1933
11. Book, *Sant Sevatan Sukrut Vadhe* by Narayan Desai, Chap. 6, published by Balgovind Prakashan
12. *Shukratarak-Sama-Mahadevbhai*, pp. 129-30
13. *M. D.'s Diary* - 3, p. 350 (Guj.)
14. *Ibid.* p. 362 (Guj.)
15. *Ibid.* pp. 363-64
16. *Ibid.* p. 365, Editor's Note

17. *CWMG* - 55, p. 400
18. Mahadev Desai, *Gita According to Gandhi*, Part of Foreword, p. V
19. Swami Anand
20. *CWMG* - 56, p. 265
21. During an interview with Narayan Desai, 1991

CHAPTER XXXVI

HERE THERE IS ENDLESS PEACE

Lord Willingdon and the British Government had to deal with a tough man who was more than a match for them. The weapons he used in his struggle were so unique that neither the British Army Generals nor the politicians were trained to outmanoeuvre them. These people who understood only the language of negotiation, money, punishment and division, found the statesmanship of truth rather confusing. They had learnt how to confront an attack by armed soldiers, but unarmed resistance was something new to them. Moreover, Gandhiji had two other powers which could put the Government machinery in a quandary. Gandhiji had unlimited faith in God which did not allow him to lose hope in the worst of situations; and he had 'items of constructive work' which nourished the movement at all times.

Gandhiji's faith in God saved him from death twice during his fasts. The Government did not want him to die in prison and thus draw the onus upon themselves. And so they released him at the very beginning of his self purification fast the first time, and the second time he was released because of Andrew's persuasion.

But Gandhiji was not one to sit quietly after the release. Constructive work was his refuge during a period of emergency. During that period he selected the removal of untouchability. To the sacrifice for freedom was added the offering of purity. He spread the use of the word Harijan widely, which he had begun to use for the untouchables, two years previously.

To promote a sense of contribution in the caste Hindus towards the Harijans, to serve those neglected people in various fields of life and to collect funds for them, Gandhiji toured the country for about nine months out of his remaining term of imprisonment. He began propagating the decisions arrived at during the Yeravda Pact, mainly temple-entry for Harijans, allowing them to draw water from reservoirs and public taps, and encouraging their children to study in

schools with other children. This angered many of the staunch caste Hindus and many scholars tried to oppose on the basis of the scriptures. Even weapons were used where scriptures proved ineffective. Gandhiji's vehicle was attacked and many attempts were made to prevent him from travelling.

On the other hand, those Harijans who were to get some civil liberties like the other Hindus, because of the Yeravda Pact, became very angry at the interference of the die-hard caste Hindus and they started giving spiteful speeches in angry language.

Thus Gandhiji's non-violence was being tested from both sides. He talked with the staunch caste Hindus with decorum and humility and thereby gave them an object lesson for the removal of untouchability; and exhorted his colleagues to maintain patience and bear with some harassment which might result from loving persuasion. He explained and impressed upon his co-workers that it was natural for the Harijans who were oppressed by injustice for centuries, to react strongly.

During this Harijan tour Mahadev was in jail for the greater part of it. And so there was the absence of the one who could have spread the message effectively among the people. Most of Gandhiji's colleagues were in and out of prison during this period. And so he had to train new workers at almost all the places for this new programme.

When in July 1934 Mahadev was released from Hindalga jail, Gandhiji's Harijan tour was on its last lap; he was in Karachi. But he insisted that Mahadev should first go to Gujarat to meet Durgaben and Babla before coming to him. And so it was decided that Mahadev should join Gandhiji at Lahore when the latter went there on his return from Karachi. The reader can surely imagine the joy Mahadev must have felt at this meeting, but even for Gandhiji it was an equally joyful occasion. In the numerous letters written from Karachi Gandhiji gave the news that Mahadev was joining him at Lahore. Pyarelal also joined Mahadev from Delhi en route Lahore. And thus once again the family gathered round Gandhiji. Kasturba and Kakasaheb had joined this tour quite early.

Prior to this Gandhiji went to Belgaum in February 1934 during his Harijan tour. At that time Gandhiji received the latest news about both Mahadev and Maniben. There was only one piece of news about Mahadev — he was engrossed in writing the book. Gandhiji had sent him special suggestions not to forget exercise as well as to take care of his eyes.

After Lahore Gandhiji stayed for three days in Calcutta and then went to Kanpur. From there he went to Benares. Gandhiji's resolve to spend one year only in Harijan work, keeping away from

politics, came to an end in Benares. Even there the caste Hindus had expressed their opinions about untouchability, which were at variance with his. In the realm of thought, neither Gandhiji nor the caste Hindus, had been able to swerve any one from their thinking. And still it can be said that though people like Pandit Lalnath carried on demonstrating against Gandhiji, the opposition was not as vehement as before.

Once when in a meeting in Ajmer, Lalnath was demonstrating with black flags, people who had come to hear Gandhiji got excited and started pushing Lalnath and his group. Lalnath was hurt in the scuffle. Gandhiji scolded those who expressed their anger in this manner and fasted as an atonement.

In one of the meetings in Benares, Gandhiji and the caste Hindus addressed the gathering from the same platform. The atmosphere was friendly.

The socialist workers of the Congress founded the Congress Socialist Party in May 1934. This idea was conceived in different prisons. The party was given a constitutional structure in the sessions of Bombay and Patna after the workers were released from the prison. Acharya Narendra Dev and Jay Prakash Narayan were elected President and General Secretary of the party respectively. Minoo Masani as one of the secretaries of the party displayed his considerable capacity of bringing people together. Over and above these office-bearers the party consisted of recognised intellectuals such as Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherali, Shri Prakash and Ashok Mehta.

Mahadev felt that if Vallabhbhai could remain present when these socialists were going to meet Gandhiji, "Bapu would get a lot of help from you (Vallabhbhai) to be saved from the Benares hassle." But Vallabhbhai could not attend the Congress Working Committee meeting, because of indisposition. During the stay in Yeravda Jail Gandhiji, Sardar and Mahadev daily talked of so many things that there was hardly anything about the country and the world that was not covered by the talks. That's why when they were away from Sardar, Gandhiji and Mahadev repeatedly remembered him. Whenever necessary they used to correspond and advise each other. For instance Mahadev wrote from Calcutta in a letter of 21-7-34 to Sardar :

"In a manner of speaking it is good that you have started firing shots immediately on your release from prison. Because there is no other way out for timidity and cowardice. On the other hand, it might be that there is an unnecessary haste in what you are doing. Please let the peasants and other broken-down people take proper advantage of your release. You are

talking of returning home (jail) after sending them all to the Assemblies. But at least till then should you not relax?"²

During this time, Amritlal Sheth whilst talking on the subject of the native states, had expressed Gandhiji's approach in brief. "Our ways are separate. I will help you if you allow me to go my way. But I would get confused if you make me go your way."³ Gandhiji could have said the same thing to the Congress as well as to the Socialists. But whether they were workers in the native states or in British India, whether they were members of the Congress Working Committee or of the Congress Socialist Party, one and all wanted to take shelter under Gandhiji's name, but they wanted to go their own independent way. And that is why Gandhiji decided to get away from everything and concentrate on constructive work. Moreover, he decided to go and live at Segaon, instead of at Wardha, which allowed him to completely engross himself in constructive work.

During this very period Gandhiji played an active role in establishing Harijan Sevak Sangh and All India Khadi and Village Industries Board. The All India Spinners' Association had already been established a decade previously. But he also gave a new look to the Spinners' Association so that the women who spun could get fair wages.

On his release from the jail in May 1934, Gandhiji had withdrawn the National Civil Disobedience and confined it to himself. He himself also wanted to avoid a self-invited imprisonment. The cause for the withdrawal of the entire movement was the conduct of the Satyagrahis in the jail.

Gandhiji had taken this decision to suspend the mass Satyagraha because of his devotion to truth and the attitude of a real Satyagrahi but from the national point of view, it was one which earned him respect as a Commander of a battle as well as a clever strategist. As such the movement had begun with the Dandi March. The nation hardly had time to rest even during the Gandhi Irwin Pact, because the Government broke the Pact almost as soon as it was signed. Confiscations, threats, arrests and oppression were going on even when Gandhiji went to the Round Table Conference. And so, many workers needed some rest. The suspension of mass civil disobedience provided that rest to all categories of workers. It is the responsibility of the leader to see that a wide-spread despair does not grip the people during such a period. By continuing his tour almost constantly and giving fillip to various constructive work programmes Gandhiji had taken care to see that there was no despair.

What place did Mahdev occupy in this entire strategy? He did not have any difficulty in deciding about his role because of his self-

accepted duty of self-purification through devotion to Gandhiji and the nation. He joined Gandhiji at Lahore, the nation also accepted the fact that Mahadev's place could not be anywhere else but with Gandhiji.

Mahadev added his own experiments to Gandhiji's experiments related to spinning.

Gandhiji was bound by his vow not to return to the Sabarmati Ashram until he got independence. So in March 1931, when he was released from jail, he stayed at Seth Ranchhoddas's house and was arrested on August 1st, 1933 also from the same place. He did not stay at the Ashram a couple of times after that even when he went to Ahmedabad. But a problem had arisen for those Ashramites with families when all the Ashramites had been arrested at the time of the March towards Raas. Where should Durga, Maniben Parikh, Velanben and others stay when they were released? Their children, who were in Ansuyaben's school, were all eager to be with their mothers! But where should they stay? Maniben's father's place was in Ahmedabad. But their 'home' was in the Ashram. After Narahari was released, it was decided that all of them should stay on the first floor of the Congress House in Bhadra. The children were all very happy at this arrangement. But it was a temporary arrangement. When Gandhiji gave over the Ashram to the Harijan Sevak Sangh, after a few days, all these people went to the Ashram to stay at their old homes. And once again the atmosphere was resounding with joyous sounds. When in October 1934 the attachment of Gujarat Vidyapith was removed, the Vinay Mandir started functioning and the majority of the Ashram children went there for their studies.

Jamnallalji had kept an orchard of oranges along with a two-storied building for Gandhiji at Wardha. For some months Gandhiji stayed there. That orchard was named 'Maganwadi' in memory of Maganlal Gandhi.

When Gandhiji was in Wardha, he saw the conditions of the villages near Wardha city. His attention was drawn chiefly to the abundance of filth in the villages. He started a regular village cleanliness campaign along with his colleagues. In the Ramnagar area, adjacent to 'Maganwadi' and in the lanes of Sindi village, he saw human excreta lying around. Gandhiji gave buckets and spades to his group and started removing the excreta. Miraben took over this work started by Gandhiji. When Mahadev reached there, the cleaning of Sindi village was added to his daily routine.

It was not possible to withhold this news from Sardar! Mahadev wrote to him in his letter of 30-3-35:

"Our toilet cleaning work is going on. It is a gigantic task. The people are completely shameless. They do not have any

feeling at all. It will not be surprising if within a few days they start believing that we are their scavengers.⁴

He once again wrote on 21-11-35 :

"Mira is leaving Sindi village after conceding defeat. So, there will be an emergency there as well. How can I leave from here under these circumstances ? Bapu also is not ready to grant me permission. . . ."⁵

Here is a description of how the work at Sindi village started given in Miraben's words :

"The inhabitants of this village . . . used the sides of the roads . . . for easing themselves. I happened to mention this matter to Bapu and he immediately said, 'It is our duty to teach these people sanitation and if they won't listen . . . we should clean up. . . .' The villagers proved deaf . . . So Bapu told me to take bucket and shovel and any volunteers and daily go to clean. . . ."⁶

Almost after one year when Durga and Babla went to stay at Maganwadi, Miraben and Gandhiji had left to stay at Segaon. Even so, for a long time Mahadev had continued the cleaning work at the Sindi village as a sacrificial offering ! Babla also joined in this work at that time. But he had asked some questions to Bapu regarding this.

I asked Bapu, "What is the advantage of this work ? There is no effect on the villagers. On the contrary they go on giving orders to us to clean various places."

Bapu said, "So ! You are already tired ! Ask Mahadev, since how long he is doing this cleaning ! There is devotion in his work. You also must cultivate that. The stigma of untouchability is not a small thing ! We will have to prayerfully strive for a very long time to remove it."

But I was not prepared to accept that argument. "But Bapu, if they do not improve what is the point of the cleaning activity ?"

Bapu gave a different twist to the discussion and said, "Nevertheless, the worker who cleans gets the advantage. Is he not being trained ?"

I : "But should the villagers also not get the training ?"

Bapu smiled and said, "You are indeed a lawyer. But there is sense in what you say. If we learn how to train them I shall dance."

Continuing he said, "If I am in your place, I will observe carefully. If someone gets up after easing himself, I will immediately go there. If I see any rottenness in the excreta I will tell him gently, 'Your stomach seems to be upset, you

should try a particular remedy', and thus I will try to win him over."

Bapu's enthusiasm increased when he found me silent. He said, "If I could have my say I would not only thoroughly clean up the roads, but would plant flower-plants there, water them daily and create gardens where there are heaps of rubbish. Cleanliness can be an art."⁷

Mahadev's main work of portraying Gandhiji before the world continued unabated even during 1934-35.

Some excerpts from Dr. Dodd's interview with Gandhiji are given below. Dr. Dodd was a President of a college for women barristers ! He had come specially from abroad for the interview :

Q. : What is your main objective, Mr. Gandhi ?

A. : The main objective is obvious and it is to gain independence, not for the literate and the rich in India, but for the dumb millions

Q. : . . . And what are your methods ?

A. : Not many methods, but the one method of unadulterated truth and non-violence . . . the central fact in my programme is the spinning wheel.

Q. : . . . Your spinning programme . . . is for . . . fighting unemployment. But with you, Mr. Gandhi, it is a moral and spiritual symbol too ?

A. : Yes, of truth and non-violence. When as a nation we adopt the spinning wheel, we not only solve the question of unemployment but we declare that we have no intention of exploiting any nation, and we also end the exploitation of the poor by the rich. . . . You, too, have got the unemployment problem, but it is of your own creation. Our unemployment is not entirely of our creation.

Q. : . . . Mr. Gandhi, . . . I should like you to tell me what you consider your most satisfactory achievement . . . what should I put before the young people as a thing that they should aspire after in life ?

A. : . . . I may say that, in the midst of humiliation and so called defeat and a tempestuous life, I am able to retain my peace, because of an undying faith in God, translated as Truth.

Q. : What Mr. Gandhi, has been your greatest disappointment ?

A. : Frankly I have no sense of disappointment, excepting perhaps that sometimes I am disappointed with myself, inasmuch as I cannot control the fleeting thoughts as much as I should like to

Q. : What is the source of your ideals ?

A The source is truth or the uttermost identity with all life.⁸

Jawaharlal was in jail from February 1934 but was released in August owing to Kamala Nehru's serious illness. Gandhiji sent Mahadev to Allahabad to gain an understanding of his line of thinking. After spending a few hours in Jawaharlal's company in Allahabad Mahadev wrote down his observations for Gandhiji. This conversation ought to have been only one sided. Mahadev had gone primarily to listen to Jawaharlal's views but at times Mahadev had to put forward some arguments in defence of Gandhiji. These seventeen pages of Mahadev's diary reveal Jawaharlal Nehru's character. They also display how even in jail he thought about the issues touching our nation and the world on a broad canvas.¹ Moreover, the humble, charming and yet intellectually remarkable genius of the one who kept silent and let Jawahar speak, has been brought into focus through these pages. In the discussions held during an evening and the next afternoon, Jawaharlal expressed some of his differences of opinion with Gandhiji. During this interview, since it was with Mahadev, Jawahar strongly criticised some of his own colleagues including Bapu without any hesitation and the fear of being misrepresented. Occasionally the language was such that it could be used in a private conversation only, but could not be made public. But had Mahadev not noted down these words, the liveliness of the notes would have been absent. "All others are like gnats, — I am the only one who knows", a characteristic of Jawahar's personality is very aptly illustrated here.

Mahadev interviewed Sir Daniel Hamilton of Sunderban just as he had interviewed Jawaharlal. This interview reveals to us another facet of Mahadev's personality. In Allahabad Mahadev discussed political questions at national level while at Gosaba he discussed village reconstruction programme with equal interest from the point of view of the constructive worker. For Mahadev politics and constructive work were not incongruous, both of them merged into a confluence for him, a devotee of the devotee of non-violence.

A very apt picture emerged of two old and deeply devoted friends in a talk between Gandhiji and Charlie Andrews in August 1934. Andrews tried his level best to persuade Gandhiji to visit Europe, but Gandhiji did not hesitate to reply, "No. I clearly see that my work lies here. If God wants a message to be given to the world, He will give me a sign."⁹

It is indeed surprising to see the notes of Mahadev's extensive reading which he accomplished even amidst the extremely heavy work load during this period. In that reading too there was a variety

of current subjects, there was also the desire to explain to the opponent and to keep an open mind

In a number of places in Mahadev's diaries, there are quite a few incidents, important and unimportant, which enlighten the reader. His humour was ever present. In his style we find both detail and brevity, as and when required. How ingenious are the two lines written about the Hindi poet Siyaramsharan Gupta! "There was no end to his humility. I had gone to receive him at the station. He prostrated himself before me, right there on the platform."¹⁰ Or this sentence of Gandhiji, "I am alert even when I am asleep. My sleep is not oblivion, it is refreshing."¹¹

He wrote to an American: "There is no limit to love. My nationalism includes all the countries of the world, without any thought about religion or ideology."¹²

Margaret Sanger, who supported family planning on compassionate grounds and was the leader of the Birth-Control Movement, specially came to meet Gandhiji. Mathuradas Trikumji gave this information to him. Gandhiji wrote to him, "One may propagate a thing that is spiritually elevating. How can one propagate something which has a lowering tendency?"^{12a}

Mrs. Sanger came in December 1935. She said that she had come on an invitation from Indian women. But her main objective in coming to India was to meet Gandhiji. She gave her viewpoint and started the conversation. She said:

"Till the women cannot control child-birth, the nation cannot become independent. The world is in misery because of uncontrolled child-birth. If you can teach our women some method by which they can gain control, Indian women will have hope in their lives."

Gandhiji said, "I go on teaching the women that they themselves are their masters. Even when I used force against my wife, I used to teach her the same thing."

Both seemed to be agreed that woman should be emancipated. Gandhiji went on to the extent to say, "I believe, the struggle is difficult", but he blamed the men for that. About himself he said, "Some consider me half woman." He believed that many questions could be solved if women learned merely to say 'no' to their husbands. Rabindranath and Sarojini Naidu believed in birth control. Gandhiji had discussed the question with them as well. He respected their intelligence and so he asked himself why he could not agree with them! Mrs. Sanger found Gandhiji's solution so impractical that she felt that Gandhiji's way would lead to a divorce. Gandhiji was talking about mutual consent. Mrs. Sanger felt that the law was

against the woman. Gandhiji informed her that India did not have such laws.

Mrs. Sanger asked a question, "Was there any difference in a keen desire for sex and an affectionate sexual union, or not? Your opposition is against madness of carnal desires — is it not?"

Gandhiji said, "If both want to satisfy carnal desire without any thought for the result, I would not consider that love. That is the basis of our difference of opinion."

Mrs Sanger : "Will you consider all sex-relation as carnal desire?"

Gandhiji said, "All relations without the objective of procreation would be considered that."

Mrs Sanger said, "That is illogical. Either it is a union of love or it is lust. There are two types of sex-relations : loving and lustful. If because of our culture we could climb a step towards God, we cannot mix it up with lust."

Gandhiji felt that there was some mistake here. He gave his own example and said, ". . . There was affection between us always but we came closer and closer the more I became restrained. When time weighed lust came in and when I achieved a higher ideal time did not weigh."

Mrs. Sanger said, "Lustful love is powerful and capable of developing us, the life blossoms with it."

Gandhiji did not agree. He believed that even food partaken for pleasure is lust. It amounted to someone relishing alcohol, and the doctor giving him medicine to prevent his being adversely affected by it.

Mrs Sanger did not accept this simile. Gandhiji said, "You would not agree because you believe this is a need of the soul and this union without the desire for progeny is a spiritual need."

Mrs Sanger said, "I positively believe that both meet sexually for self-expression. The birth of a child is matter of exception."

Gandhiji felt this to be a reverse process. He believed that one could show spiritual love devoid of lust, for all.

Mrs. Sanger summarised the matter and said, "You mean to say that natural restraint can bring about the solution! Does it mean that the husband and wife have to sacrifice their lives for such a relationship?"

Gandhiji said, "In the last analysis this is a matter of training of temperance in behaviour. . . . Would people not accept, will we not go further? Do we want to play in muck?"

Mrs. Sanger said, "Birth-control and training goes hand-in-hand. She had said in her first pamphlet in 1914, that the woman should act like the instrument for measuring pressure, and she must take the decision." Gandhiji said that he accepted this in its entirety.

Then Mrs. Sanger turned to psychology. "Do you believe that normally, advice to follow self-restraint should not be given as the nerves are adversely affected thereby?"

Gandhiji: No. The examples given by the psychologists are those given after testing dissipated people.

Sanger: The lustful desire has been given by God. How can there be anything bad or demeaning in something which is God-given?

Gandhiji: If both are not ready and if only one has the sexual urge, it is demeaning. You put aside your methods of birth-control. Other methods will follow. The defence for birth-control is not that weak as to make it hopeless. I can talk to the husband and show him some other way. Divorce should immediately be granted on 'grounds of health'. There should be a list of rules before me which can be socially approved.

Sanger: So some birth-control method has to be practised for a happy life.

Gandhiji: I am also searching for methods, but not such as those you talk about, but there could be other methods which could pacify and control lust.

Lastly Gandhiji said, "It is indeed difficult for both of us to understand each other and agree. I belong to a generation which believed that life is to practise restraint in every field. You believe in increasing the needs, and satisfying desires."

Sanger: We agree that nothing should be forced on anyone. Not only about behaviour and custom, but even about arguments.

Gandhiji: Some people believe in compulsory birth-control operations. If I delete my methods out of my books, the artificial methods of birth-control would come to stay, just as alcohol has come to stay. The flame of life at times flickers for a while with a drop of brandy. But someone might say that I do not want this chance to live for a while. This is the philosophy which rules over me, which runs through my veins. And this is the principle which I want to practise here and now.

Mrs. Sanger asked a question, "Which other methods? I am thinking of the period of fruition in the lives of women when they can conceive."

Gandhiji : I find some sense in this. I know I am not being very logical here. But the question of copulation in the safe week in which conception is not possible appeals to me.

Sanger : Ten days in a month. The man who has no love, would consider this also a difficulty.

Gandhiji : If there is no love, there should be divorce. The woman has the 100% means of resistance if she does not have a desire for the act. I agree with your contention that the decision rests entirely with her.

Sanger : Have you known people who have sexually united for progeny ?

Gandhiji : Of course. Quite a few.

Sanger : The motive for sexual relation is hardly the birth of children. If there is no sex-attraction for each other, there won't be any progeny even if there is copulation. For the woman that man almost becomes a Eunuch.

Gandhiji : There is want of love there. . . . There is restraint, but self-purification is its key.⁷

At the end both recollected what they had said.

Mrs. Sanger : There are thousands of married couples, who live a happy married life.

Gandhiji : But that life is best which is excellent. I say this a bit hesitantly that the life of total celibacy is the best and complete life. It is the ultimate condition from the view of a principle. . . .¹³

* * *

Shri Shankarrao Dev asked Gandhiji a question in a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh : "What is your view about the position Dr Ambedkar has taken ?"

Gandhiji said, "Had I been in Dr Ambedkar's place, I would have been as angry. In his position maybe I would not have been a believer in non violence. When overcome by anger, a person does whatever comes to his mind. Whatever Dr. Ambedkar does, we must bear it in all humility. Not only that, it would be a service to Harijans. If he really hits us with shoes, we must bear even that. But . . . there is no need to kiss Dr Ambedkar's feet . . . Our task is to wake up to the situation and purify ourselves. If we do not purify ourselves we cannot deliver the Harijan community even if we kiss the feet of fifty Ambedkars."¹⁴

Mahadev did not resign from the Congress even when Gandhiji retired from it during the Congress Session of Bombay which was held in October 1934. Quoting Mahadev as an example Gandhiji gave the assurance that he did not retire from the Congress due to unhappiness. He wrote to an Englishman :

"You have misunderstood my retirement from the Congress . . . I have retired to give it greater strength. . . . Remember that Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai, Rajagopalachari, Ansari, Mahadev and many others, of whom humanity may be proud are in it, of it, and would die for it."¹⁵

Urmiladevi Sen was Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's sister. It has already been mentioned that she looked upon Mahadev as her son. She had considered another young man, Dharendra Mukherji, also her son. He was kept as a detenu in the Delhi Camp by the Bengal Government, which considered him a dangerous terrorist. Urmiladevi was very worried as no news about him was available. She would have been satisfied if Mahadev could meet him instead of her. Gandhiji specially wrote to the Secretary of the Political Department, Government of Bengal to grant permission to Mahadev for an interview with Dhiren Mukherji. He also stated that both Mahadev and himself knew Mr. Mukherji as he had stayed at the Sabarmati Ashram for some time and he might have joined the Ashram had he not been arrested.

The Bengal Government was not very willing to grant the permission. Neither Urmiladevi, nor Mahadev, were blood relation of the detenu. Moreover, Mr. Mukherji was considered a dangerous terrorist by the Government. And yet Mahadev was allowed to meet Dhiren Mukherji because of Gandhiji's request and the Government of India's suggestion. Urmiladevi felt greatly relieved.

Mahadev was happy to render such personal service. He joined Janakidevi (Mrs. Jamnalal Bajaj) and Uma in nursing Jamnalalji after an ear operation at Bombay.

Gandhiji cared greatly about the feelings of his correspondents. If the correspondent wanted his letters to be private, Gandhiji did not show the letters to anyone. No doubt, he did not encourage such private correspondence. Generally young men and women sought privacy for their personal matters. But at times there was demand to preserve privacy for letters which were important politically. Gandhiji had assured Jawaharlal that his letters would not be shown to anyone else but Mahadev, and Jawaharlal had no objection to this. Here is a description of an interview with Gandhiji :

Gandhiji was sitting on the terrace and writing. An old man was taken upstairs as soon as Gandhiji was free to see him. The neatly dressed old man placed before Gandhiji ten neatly arranged wads of currency notes and said, "This is for the poorest and the most deserving. You know them better than anyone else."

Gandhiji : "That is very good. But how many years' savings does this mean ?"

"Many years. But I sent a hundred for the earthquake and a hundred to Assam, and in Allahabad four years ago I gave Rs. 500/- for the peasants."

"Oh, then tell me what was your salary and what is your pension? And what were you?"

"I was a school master. When I retired after many years' service my salary was Rs. 52/- per month. I get no pension, but I was given a gratuity of Rs. 2700/."

"And how long ago did you retire?"

"Five years ago."

"And how much do you spend on your own living?"

"Oh, my living! Hardly much."

"But still one has to live. Tell me how much you need."

"A little dal roti does not cost much. I can do with Rs. 10/ a month. I have no one to take care of. I used to have nephews whom I supported and educated but now I am free. I have also a Sanskrit school to which I devote most of my time now. It is a free school."

"So you saved a few thousands out of your small salary and have been devoting it to the service of the poor. A great thing. How I wish everyone could learn that art from you."

"Yes, Mahatmaji, I have spent very little on myself and I have often been able to give away what I had to the poor."

Admiring his patched clothes, which did not need to be supplemented by shawls or blankets, Gandhiji asked "And where did you get this Khadi?"

"It is home-made Khadi."

"You make me envy you."

"I have still some savings left, Mahatmaji," said the old man, his face suffused with the joy of giving. "I shall bring all that, some other time. I do not know where to give the money. I know you, and you know the poorest who deserve help. I am deeply thankful."¹⁶

Now let us go back a bit. For a long time Gandhiji had wanted to go to the North-West Frontier Province. But the Government refused to grant him permission. The Frontier leader, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan had been detained in prison for years. When he was released, he was banned from entering the Frontier Province. Gandhiji told Mahadev that the biography of Badshah Khan should be placed before the country and the world. Mahadev prepared a biography, small, yet presenting all the basic facts, after interviews with Badshah Khan and his elder brother, Dr. Khan Sahab. They were called 'Two Servants of God'. He had titled it *Bey Khudai Khidmatgar*. That book was so much in demand that over and above

the English and Gujarati editions it was translated into Hindi and other languages. Later on more than one biography of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan were written. But all biographies took Mahadev's biography as the basic text. Gandhiji had written a typical short Foreword to this book :

"It is a good thing that this concise account of the two servants of God is being placed before the Gujarati reading public. The lives of these two brothers are, in my view, very pure. Of the two, Shri Abdul Gaffar Khan seems to be a veritable *fakir*. I see this trait in the letters he has been writing from the prison. From day-to-day his self-abnegation has been increasing and the contemplation of God in his heart becoming more intense. No house where Gujarati is read should be without a copy of this book.

"The book is not a mere translation of the original English. The author has tried to write an independent book of his own, and one acquainted with both the languages can easily see that he has succeeded in the attempt. This book has also something fresh to contribute."¹⁷

Gandhiji believed that literature belonged to Mahadev's forte. So when Dilip Kumar Roy sent his poems for his opinion, Gandhiji wrote :

"I am no judge of poetry. Of what use, therefore, can be any opinion of mine on your poems? I have really no opinion to offer. But now Mahadev is free. He is himself a poet. And he will, I doubt not, give you his opinion."¹⁸

Mahadev used to be very worried about Gandhiji's health because of his high blood pressure. Moreover, Gandhiji insisted on certain habits in his life style and also during tours. Mahadev used to get fed up. But to whom could he turn? Sardar was like an elder brother. And he also worried equally about Gandhiji's health. So Mahadev could express his irritation about Bapu to Sardar.

And watch how Mahadev tempted Sardar to come to Wardha. He wrote :

"My own feelings made me insist on your coming here, without telling Bapu. Now you can see Bapu's insistence. So I feel that you should hasten here. There is endless peace here. This morning Bapu said, 'I have started grasping many things, and clearly see things that I did not see before.' What could be better than your being beside me under these circumstances?

Your presence will be very valuable when Bapu arrives at some decision. . . "¹⁹

Mahadev constantly tried to save Gandhiji from the crowds during rail travel. Sometimes he would plead with people not to

wake up Gandhiji by a lot of noise, at times he would cover the bulb of the third class compartment with a blue cloth to save Gandhiji getting the glare, at times he would tell the crowd, "I am Gandhiji, have my *darshan*!" But at times Gandhiji also snatched the opportunity of doing service to Mahadev. Once during a travel, Mahadev worked on some writing till very late at night and in the early morning his eyes closed with sleep. In the morning when he woke up at some big station, he saw that Gandhiji was waiting smilingly, for Mahadev to get up, with a pot of tea and a plate of bread and butter.

FOOTNOTES

1. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-patro*, p. 28, Dtd. 21-7-1934
2. Ibid. p. 29
3. *M. D.'s Diary* - 19, p. 20 (Guj.)
4. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-patro* - 4, p. 54, Dtd. 30-3-'35
5. Ibid. p.77, Dtd. 21-11-'35
6. *CWMG* - 61, p. 104 - Footnote
7. Narayan Desai, *Sant Sevatan-Sukrut Vadhe* (3rd Edition) pp. 48-49
8. *CWMG* - 58, pp. 399 to 402 selected
9. *M. D.'s Diary* - 19, p. 101 (Guj.)
10. *M. D.'s Diary* - 20, p. 87 (Guj.)
11. Ibid. p. 87 (Guj.)
12. Ibid., p. 108 (Guj.)
- 12a. Ibid. p. 165 (Guj.)
13. *CWMG* - 62, pp. 156 to 160 selected
14. Ibid. p.251
15. *CWMG* - 59, p.396
16. *CWMG* - 60, pp.92-93
17. *CWMG* - 60, pp.92-93
18. *CWMG* - 58, p.195
19. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-patro* - 4, p. 39 Dtd. 19-9-'34

THE SACRIFICE

"The covering was submitted as it was (Unsullied)."

— *Kabir*

"The lesser peaks on the path of non-violence,
Consist of observance of its rules and restraints;
But the ultimate peak —
Is indeed self-abnegation."

— *Mahadevbhai*

"Adorn yourself O Clever one !
For you have to go to your Beloved."

— *Kabir*

"He has the capacity to Welcome death
Happily, with the pen in his hand."

— *Gandhiji*

CHAPTER XXXVII

LOVE FILLS THE ABODE

Maganwadi, which Jamnalalji donated to the nation was indeed a very pleasant spot. Nagpur oranges were nationally and internationally popular. Those oranges grew, not only in Nagpur but almost in the whole of the Vidarbha area in every district. Ripe, brightly coloured oranges would hang down amongst many dark green leaves of the bower of trees. The sight was indeed enchanting. For Babla, who had eaten plundered tomatoes, white-radishes or carrots from the fields of Sabarmati Ashram, the sight of Maganwadi reduced him to the condition of Ali when 'Ali' saw the mounds of jewel after the gates of the cave opened at the words 'Open Sesame', in the story of "Ali Baba and Forty Thieves".

For the first time in his life, in the twelfth year, Babla was going to get to live 'permanently' with his father and he was happily enthusiastic. Otherwise, prior to this, the days of rejoicing for him were confined to whenever his 'papa' came to the Sabarmati Ashram. Because 'papa' happened to be Babla's father, but to Babla, as well as to his paternal aunt Nirmala, and to his mother Durgaben, he was almost like a 'guest'. And so during the entire journey from Sabarmati to Wardha, Babla had been dreaming about staying with papa. Before he reached Maganwadi, papa had become the hero of Babla's world of imagination. It was also a fact that he was a little afraid of papa because, when his mother bought a cycle for him to go to the Vidyapith from the Ashram, he had rebuked Babla in a letter saying, "How can poor people like us spend forty rupees?" But Babla did not realize then, and even today he is not fully aware how Durgaben, 'wealthy with three quarters of a hundred',¹ had saved those forty rupees for the cycle. But in spite of that slight fear Babla was extremely happy to be going to Maganwadi. But even in that imagination or dream there certainly were no orchards full of hundreds of oranges. The trees were also so approachable. One

could pluck the fruit by merely raising one's hand. And there was no dearth of ripe fruits fallen on the ground.

Mahadev gave his first piece of ethical advice to Babla when he saw him gazing with wide eyes at the orchard. "The oranges are very nice, aren't they? We shall daily get as many as we want. This orchard has been named in the memory of Magankaka. And Kakaji (Jamnalaji) has donated it to the nation. So now it does not even belong to him. All these oranges now belong to the institution. We can see them but not pluck them. We will buy daily as many as we want." This was indeed a salutary advice but as it had been given by papa in his language it was not that unpalatable. Therefore not once did Babla cast a greedy glance at those oranges.

Actually the bliss of Mahadev's life of a householder started at Maganwadi, thirty-two years after his marriage. In Bombay and Ahmedabad, Mahadev did have occasional satisfaction, but this was almost the first opportunity of joy when curious Babla's questions came almost non-stop. For the first time he had the pleasure of worrying about the marriage of a younger sister, Bachu, twenty-six years his junior as he was in jail when Shanta got married. He must have been worried a lot about Durga's health, but this was probably the first time when he could actually look after. Mahadev was experiencing for the first time the value of married life . . . and the happy consciousness of responsibility. We may say that Durgaben's empty abode was filled with joy.

Once whilst cleaning Sindi village, Miraben felt that she would like to leave the town and stay in a real village, and Gandhiji encouraged her to do so. For some time she stayed in Vadodara village, but later she selected Segaoon. In a very short time the deity Mohandas followed the devotee Mira and decided to stay in Segaoon. There was no post office in the village, so it was decided that Mahadev would stay at Maganwadi, Wardha; would go to Segaoon daily with the morning post and return in the evening with the outgoing post, handling the rest of the work there during the day. Bapu was going to settle down in the village, so Mahadev asked Durgaben to come and stay at Wardha after vacating Sabarmati.

Wardha's Navabharat Vidyalaya was called Marwari Vidyalaya at that time. Jamnalaji used to have a say in its management as he did in many other institutions of Wardha. E. W. Aryanayakam, who had recently come from Shantiniketan, had taken over as the Acting Principal. The administration was the same as before Aryanayakam's appointment as the Principal. Mahadev intended to admit Babla in that school for his education. Narayan rejected the Vidyalaya after the first day's experience. All these years Narayan had been brought up in the Ashram. He had spent the last year as a student of the fifth

standard of Vinay Mandir of Gujarat Vidyapith. There he was known as mischievous but clever student. Once or twice, complaints about him spread as far as Maganwadi from the Vidyapith. But here *he* had to complain about the Vidyalaya. Instead of complaining, he gave his final verdict: "Papa, I am not going to study in such a school," and to support his decision he used the ultimate weapon of a child-weeping! Then he slowly described the things he objected to in the Vidyalaya.

Mahadev neither rebuked, nor scolded Narayan; nor did he admonish him for deciding without giving thought. He merely said, "The decision will be yours, but won't you take Bapuji's advice once?"

Narayan was prepared for it. Quickly he wiped off the tears and scribbled off a letter to Bapu, in which he described in detail, all the vices of the Marwari Vidyalaya he had seen in one day. The last sentence of the letter was decisive. It was to the effect that he had written this letter for seeking advice, but had definitely decided that he was not going to study in such a Vidyalaya.

Next morning Mahadev himself took Narayan's letter along with the other post and brought Bapu's reply the same evening, "Bravo!"

Durgaben was worried. Some time previously some older boys from the Ashram had left the Ashram and gone out to take 'proper education'. If that didn't happen with Babla would he not regret it? Mahadev was busy for the whole day, from where would he find time to teach Babla? What would he do in future if he did not study? Those were the points which worried her. Next day Mahadev received a letter from Gandhiji saying that now it was their responsibility (Gandhiji's and Mahadev's) to educate Babla. That he should join in their work, and that would be his education.

On the other hand, Aryanayakam found Babla's decision childish. He wrote to Gandhiji saying that it would be a mistake to discontinue Babla's education. "He is avoiding school because he is still a child. But then he would be nowhere. The shortcomings of Vidyalaya would be gradually dealt with since he had taken up its reins."

Gandhiji called both Aryanayakam and Narayan to Segaon. The case was presented in the presence of Gandhiji during his walk for three days. Narayan told Gandhiji the very first day, "Nayakamji is a very learned man. My arguments would not be effective before his. But my decision is final." Gandhiji whispered to Narayan, "Why do you worry? I am your pleader."

One more responsibility was added to Mahadev's workload to educate Narayan. But Bapu willingly shared that responsibility. If

Mahadev hesitated in making some arrangements for Babla's studies, Gandhiji would understand, and would compensate. In a very short time the question of travel came up. Having settled down in a village, Gandhiji got an invitation to go to Madras. It was some special function of the South India Hindi Pracharini Sabha. The visit would last five or six days including the journey. Mahadev said, "We should give some assignment here to Babla for those days." But it was Bapu who decided who was to go with him on the tour. A note came from him from Segaon. He wrote: "We have undertaken Babla's responsibility, we would be going out of Segaon off and on. And as his education is going to be through his work with us, Babla must go with us to Madras." Narayan's joy knew no bound. Durgaben was also pleased. Mahadev initially did not approve of spending so much public money, but once Bapu's decision was made, he joyfully accepted the thought. For Babla it was as if the doors of the Chest of Knowledge had opened with this opportunity to travel with Bapu. His inquisitiveness spread its wings and to satisfy that or to direct him to the source from where he could satisfy it, he had papa who was a fountain of knowledge.

A new factor was added to Babla's education. He had no examination to pass, nor any prescribed course of studies. Mahadev had left it to Babla to decide what he wanted to learn. There were quite a few changes in the course of studies either due to Babla's instability of the mind or due to the various scholars coming to see Bapu and staying with him. He might have wasted time because of this, but this education was somewhat like the Indian concept of training. That training, once taken, was accumulated in a corner of the mind or the heart. Even today some of the things learnt long ago, make an appearance when necessary. The programme for Narayan's education was arranged as follows: To work with Mahadev in the office and do the tasks indicated, to learn a 'subject' from people who came to stay temporarily with Gandhiji, if Narayan was introduced to them by Mahadev, and every Sunday to go walking to Segaon with Mahadev to listen to Gandhiji's lecture. On the way Mahadev would teach him Sanskrit verses or discuss something informative. Within three to four months Narayan took up the responsibility of typing out Mahadev's English articles. This took up most of the time he spent in the office. In the initial stages Mahadev wrote his beautiful English handwriting still more carefully so that Babla may find it easy to type. Then Mahadev made a condition with Narayan that there should not be a single mistake in typing, and if a mistake occurred that page should be retyped. Narayan accepted it and made a counter-condition that, no matter that was beyond his

comprehension, should be posted. This resulted in the weekly articles sent for the *Harijan* being brought into Narayan's range of studies.

Mahadev was specially careful to see that Narayan was not deprived of studying the subjects in which he himself was not well-versed. Once when Ghanshyamdas Birla went to England Mahadev requested him to bring a box of carpenter's tools and a box for conducting chemical experiments.

As we are on the subject of Narayan's education, we may refer to some of his teachers. Narayan had arranged some of his classes with a couple of people who stayed constantly with Gandhiji. To introduce Narayan to the teachers was Mahadev's responsibility, but to decide on the subjects and time-table devolved on Narayan. Acharya Bhansali and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur took Narayan's classes for years together. Those who came to Gandhiji just for a day could only be helpful for a talk at times. When Mahadev had talks with Jawaharlal or Sardar, they just tolerated Narayan's presence, though Rajaji welcomed him. Narayan took lessons in socialism from Acharya Narendra Dev, when he came to Gandhiji for treatment for a period of three months. Bhulabhai Desai was very fond of Durgaben's Anavil type of cooking and so he invariably dined with Mahadev. But Narayan does not remember to have taken advantage of his company. Only his son, Dhirubhai, continued to persuade Narayan to take some training and some certificates. Every time he visited, he would bring up the subject about the future when Mahadev would not be there! Narayan was indeed tempted at his suggestion of getting a training as a pilot. Otherwise, he had not been tempted by anything else. Sadiq Ali taught Narayan Urdu and when he got a first class in the Urdu examination of Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti, Sadiq Ali gave a certificate to the examiners that they must have been extremely lenient. Two other teachers, indeed, are worthy of mention. One was Laza Delvasto. He had come and stayed at Wardha for about three months in 1937. He was a very good painter. Narayan daily went to him to learn painting. When he went off to Gangotri, Narayan praised him a lot to Mahadev, who then said at last, "Do you want to know what he said about you? He said, 'Your son will be able to become anything else in his life, but he could never become a good painter.' " This was probably the first certificate Narayan got in his life! He took several lessons for months in geometry and carpentry from Maurice Friedman (Bharatananda) of Poland. Narayan believed that as a teacher, there could be none worse than Friedman. Bharatananda told Mahadev when he left Wardha that he had never got a better student than Narayan.

Mahadev used to spin 500 yards yarn in his later years. To spin fine yarn it easily took him an hour. Mahadev's hour of spinning was Narayan's 'study' time. It was his 'one hour school'.

After about a year and a half, Mahadev went to stay at Sevagram, when 'Segaon' was transformed into Sevagram and a regular Post Office was established there. In Sevagram Ashram Bapu handed over the toilet-cleaning work to Narayan for years together. If any new guest came to stay in the Ashram Bapu allotted him or her toilet cleaning work. In this way as an 'experienced colleague' Narayan came into contact with all the new Ashramites.

Mahadev took great care to get new and varied books for Narayan. Thus Narayan got many books from Jawaharlal's library, brought by him few years ago for his daughter Indira.

Nirmala, whose pet name was Bachu, was like a daughter to Mahadev since, although in relationship she was his sister, she was very junior in years. Ichhaba wanted her to be married in the Anavil community and Mahadev wanted to respect his mother's wishes. He tried to find a good match at many places but the opposite parties knew that being Mahadev's sister there would be no dowry. Even otherwise the family was poor, so in spite of trying at more than one place, there was no favourable response. Durgaben was very worried about this and she rebuked Mahadev for not putting in more effort. Mahadev gave only one reply, "Our condition is like that of Narsinh Mehta. The one who took care of the necessary ceremony for Kunverbai would send our Bachu to a proper place." And really his faith was rewarded. Mahadev got a guileless, warm, scholarly and prudent brother-in-law.

Durgaben was not keeping well. Her health had deteriorated after the first delivery. Narayan had never seen his mother hale and hearty as he grew up. Gandhiji always suggested one experiment or another, but no experiment was pursued to its end. She carried the burden of the family alone in poor health and more or less away from Mahadev. In the Ashram she was considered as one of the elders and so had to undertake more responsibilities. In spite of all this, Durgaben's personality developed in a unique manner. Narahari Parikh described a couple of incidents after she came to Sabarmati Ashram :

"Once Mahadev was returning to the Ashram in a carriage accompanied by Shri Ramdas. They saw a female monkey lying in a precarious condition, being attacked and torn by dogs. Mahadev brought her to the Ashram in the carriage. Fortunately for the monkey the quarters of Shri Chhaganlal Gandhi were then vacant. Mahadev kept her there. When we started dressing the wounds of the animal, it was found that the

wound caused on her forehead by the teeth of the dogs was three quarters of an inch deep, and her legs were so severely bitten that she could not move. She was treated with earth padding; and with proper diet, she regained strength enough to move about inside the room. One day some one having left the door open, she came out and climbed an adjoining tree. Durgaben was afraid that she might again fall a prey to dogs and she followed her. But the monkey jumped from tree to tree and went right upto Vadaj. Durgaben returned home fully tired, leaving the animal to the mercy of God.

"Compassion is Durgaben's natural gift. Once a female dog was seen lying in a serious condition between Durgaben's and Kishorelal's quarters. Kishorelal sprinkled some water on her and gave her some milk. Durgaben then actually kept her in her house and started nursing her. The female dog was cured. We gave her the name Premi — the loved one. In due course, she gave birth to pups. The verandahs of our houses were common to all of us, and these pups started spoiling the verandahs. If any one struck any of these pups, Durgaben stopped him saying that she would clean the whole verandah, but none should beat the pups. One day Kakasaheb told Mahadev, 'These pups will probably not live long; they will trouble everyone and also suffer themselves. Keep one of them if you like, but allow me to kill the others.' Durgaben heard this, but said nothing, and stood at the door with tears in her eyes. Kakasaheb saw this and walked away in silence. He never again dared to open the topic of killing the pups."²

Whenever Kedarnathji met this author, he always remembered Mahadev. He always said, "Everyone knows Mahadev, but Durgaben's virtues were also no less important." Once Shri Mota — Chunilal Bhakta — described a remarkable incident about Durgaben. His eyes were moist whilst describing it. He often had to go out of Ahmedabad for Harijan Sevak Sangh work. Once when he was going with a knapsack, Durgaben was sitting outside on the verandah. She just asked him, "So Chunibhai, you are going?" In reply Chunibhai bent down and touched her feet. As a natural gesture, Durgaben put her hand on his head. Whilst describing this Mota's eyes became wet with tears. He said, "Narayanbhai, what can I tell you? I had never experienced such a touch. As if a streak of lightning passed through my body and my whole personality came alive." Mota and Kedarnathji both were spiritual men. Having heard about Durgaben's spiritual activities, this author very often felt, "Your own mother was Mother Ganges incarnate and still you did

not bathe in that pure water ! How could a frog in the Ganges know the greatness of that river ?”

One thing must be said here about Mahadev's life as a householder, and that is, despite a number of external disturbances, it was totally satisfying internally and was full of happiness and contentment in the real sense of the term. It was a conglomeration of family members who loved each other to distraction, who were discerning about each other, respected each other and were proud of each other and tried to do whatever they could for each other. That family's attitude towards life was above all tensions and was positive. The family had experienced physical hardships. But if we looked at the balance-sheet of it, there was many times more on the credit side than on the debit one. The father had given him ideals, and mother renunciation. The son gave him joy. The ideals gave direction to his life, renunciation its essence, and enthusiasm gave joy.

Two full meals and a breakfast were the daily routine for their family. Durgaben cooked very well and enjoyed doing it. Mahadev and Babla were crazy for that food. All conversation was at meal times. They talked about people in Maganwadi, and Sevagram and also discussed national and international questions. In those talks, Babla asked, Mahadev answered and Ba (Durgaben) commented. In the evenings papa would read out something to them. This routine did not last very long, but while it lasted, it brought happiness. Another element that added to the happiness of that home was the flow of guests. Bapu's guests were Mahadev's guests till some buildings were constructed at Segaon. Of course, Jamnalalji was the chief host at Wardha. But guests who wanted to be close to Bapu preferred to stay at Maganwadi, rather than at the 'bungalow'. The members of the Congress Working Committee put up at Jamnalalji's bungalow. But most of them wanted to meet Mahadev to get an idea of how Bapu's mind worked at the time, before meeting him. Mahadev liked to lengthen the discussions Bapu would have. Babla liked to hear the ins and outs of these talks by sitting behind papa, or getting beside them after bringing tea for them. And Ba liked to prepare dishes that some of the distinguished guests liked and to feed them without much fuss. Mahadev praised Durgaben's cooking wherever he went.

The one major cloud over the happy family was that of Durgaben's constant sickness. In a way it also became a factor in keeping her and Mahadev closer to each other. Surprisingly enough, Durgaben had been present by the side of Mahadev in his every serious illness, though otherwise circumstances hardly allowed them to stay for long periods together. But that cannot be said about

Durgaben's illness. She had almost constant arthritis. Mahadev used to consult all types of people for advice about her trouble, and write to her all the remedial suggestions that were given to him. But Durgaben used to get fed up with various types of remedies. The big physician Bapu was always there. But it is doubtful whether Durgaben tried all the remedies suggested by him to the end or not. Mahadev had once arranged for Durgaben to bathe in the hot-water spring at Unai. At that time, Maniben, Durgaben's elder sister, was with her. Madhubhai J. Patel of Vansda had made all the arrangements with much affection and care. But even at that time Mahadev could not stay with her for all the time. On another occasion in 1941, Durgaben's illness took a very serious turn. Mahadev had to leave Durgaben in Bapu's and Sushila Nayar's care and go to Ahmedabad for Peace-force work. That was the first organised contingent of the Peace-force. On one hand Mahadev was trying to control Hindu Muslim riots, giving reports of day-to-day activities to Sardar who was in jail, and on the other getting news from Sevagram about Durga who was nearly at death's door. This separation was the cause of uniting their loving hearts. If Babla was sick, Durgaben would nurse him and Mahadev would shed tears or at the most bring a book from the library, read everything about the disease and then explain it to Babla. Except at the Agakhan Palace, Durgaben and Babla were always by his side in his sickness. But his sickness was not such that needed nursing except some oil-massage for the head or the feet. Mahadev needed rest, which neither Durgaben, nor Babla could give, indeed, not even Bapu could give him that.

Sometimes Mahadev tried to rest during the day by closing the room. At that time he would tell Narayan, "Baba, I am going to lie down. Do not wake me up even if an emperor comes. Even if Yama (God of Death) arrived, tell him to wait for some time."

Babla would ask mischievously, "And Kaka, what should I do, if Bapu comes?"

Mahadev did not have an answer to that. He looked at Babla and said "You rogue! In every way you trap me!"

But Babla had the answer to that question. He knew that Mahadev would be awake the minute Bapu came. There would be no need to wake him up.

We would relate here an episode which took place during the Second World War. Gandhiji had put before the nation his plan of non-violent opposition to an attack from the foreign powers. A part of that plan was for the non-violent soldiers to face the attacking armies to become 'cannon-fodder' by fearlessly standing in front of the cannons. For the success of any Gandhiji's plans, it was

imperative to put it into action through his close associates. He explained this whole plan to the inmates of Sevagram Ashram and asked as to who was ready to go to the War Front and face the cannon.

That night Babla's bed was in between Mahadev's and Durgaben's in the courtyard of their hut. Mahadev and Druga were talking, believing Babla to be asleep. Babla was listening with interest to the conversation with closed eyes, because he happened to be the subject.

Mahadev : Did you hear what Bapu said today ?

Durga : Of course, weren't we sitting together ?

Mahadev : What have you thought about it ?

Durga : What is there to think about ? We do what Bapu says.

Mahadev : Are you ready to die ?

Durga : If you have to stand before a cannon, you have got to die, haven't you ? But what has been thought about Babla ? Let us do like this. Babla is now grown up. I looked after him all these years. Now he would need education, which only you could give. So you stay here. I will enlist in Bapu's army.

Mahadev : How can I stay out ever when you enrol ? Can I stay back if Bapu's army is going to become cannon-fodder ?

Both had a point in their talk. Both kept quiet for some minutes. At last they decided that if Bapu asked for such an army they both would give their names. 'Babla has grown up and is now sensible enough. He is in God's hand.'

FOOTNOTES ·

- 1 Mahadev earned Rs. 75/- per month. So Durgaben said, "We are wealthy — with three quarters of a hundred."
2. Narahari Pankh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, pp. 60-61

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CELIBACY

Narahari refers in *Mahadev Desai's Early Life* to the letter he and Mahadev had sent regarding the list of rules for the Ashram to Gandhiji before meeting him for the first time, in which they had used their 'book-wisdom' about two subjects. Today that letter is not available. Had it been available it might have been possible to clarify whether there were any fundamental differences between Gandhiji and Mahadev on these subjects. From the written material available and with reference to whatever talks this author could have with Durgaben years after Mahadev's death, it seemed that there was no theoretical difference of opinion about the ideal of celibacy between Gandhiji and Mahadev. Whenever there seemed to be some want in its observance according to its ideal, each of them dealt with it differently. At such a time Gandhiji did not feel embarrassed to proclaim to the world his 'blunder'. Even regarding the 'experiment' he conducted in the last days of his life with the ideal of celibacy in view, he had shown adherence to truth and fearlessness. Mahadev's attitude in this matter was rather that of a shy and reserved person, somewhat fearful and timid too. On such occasions he would talk about it to Durgaben, Narahari, Mashruwala, Kakasaheb or Gandhiji. But he would not proclaim it publicly. Mahadev had never talked about either his strength or his weakness. It was in Gandhiji's nature to make a proclamation. And it was Mahadev's duty to spread it to the world. Otherwise just as Mahadev kept away from fame or publicity, he also kept away from censure.

We do not know whether Mahadev had any independent thoughts from those of Gandhiji regarding celibacy. He must, indeed, have had respectfully accepted Gandhiji's ideal. And then he must have suppressed himself, thinking himself left much behind in this matter as in many other matters. We will consider this later on in the chapter. Gandhiji's ideals in this matter were generally known

Without the observance of celibacy he considered the observance of truth and non-violence impossible. He said :

"The man who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to it if he applies his talents to anything else. . . Ahimsa means universal love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man what is there left for all the world besides ?" Then continuing this thought he asks, "Then what about people who are already married ? Will they never be able to realise Truth ? Can they never offer their all at the altar of humanity ? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married. . . If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. ..."1

When he fasted for twenty-one days in Delhi for Hindu-Muslim Unity, G. Ramachandran, a Malayali student from Shantiniketan, discussed some fundamental points. One of the subjects was celibacy. Gandhiji built the premise of celibacy thus :

".. *moksha* is freedom from birth, by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God. Now marriage is a hindrance in the attainment of this supreme object, inasmuch as it only tightens the bonds of the flesh. Celibacy is a great help, inasmuch as it enables one to lead a life of full surrender to God."2

But Gandhiji claimed that his thoughts about celibacy were not traditional. He said :

"I have not taken these vows from Patanjali. I took them up as indivisible parts of pure Satyagraha and then I got the support of religious books."3

In a letter to Mahadev he had even claimed :

"I know, of course, if I can completely follow non-violence, truth and *brahmacharya* in action, speech and thought, then we should certainly get Swaraj this year; we may also get it if someone else from among us can do these things, or if the *tapas* of all of us taken together, proves sufficient for the purpose."4

But he did not believe in the celibacy of the anchorite who is not prepared to see the face of a woman. His faith was for more positive than that. He said in a reply to one of Sadhu Surendraji's questions :

"The line of thought which prescribes that the sight of women and their contact is to be abandoned because it damages self-control as known by experience, is to my mind mistaken. It is not celibacy or self-control which can be maintained only by

discarding natural contact which is the root of service That is, renunciation without the absence of wordly desires."⁵

Mahadev had not opposed this principle of Gandhiji at any place He must have occasionally discussed it with him. But the sentiment he had expressed at various places was that of sorrow on account of his inability to attain the ideal of celibacy. When at the age of thirty he had to give a sacred thread to someone, he had to ask to recite the following incantation :

" 'May you become truthful like Harishchandra, mighty like Parashurama, a celibate, you are my celibate' — I could not hide my confusion from being expressed through my eyes; except a rigid celibate, who can give initiation for celibacy ? Even today I get a start when I think of the mental torment I experienced that day and night."⁶

Mahadev started thinking about himself after describing Vinoba's intense penance : "I felt that I would never be able to stay in the Ashram during this life if one could come and stay only after such hard and intense penance."⁷ He had said this when six years had passed after his joining Gandhiji.

We know that in the list of rules for the residents of the Ashram, an important one was that of celibacy. Mahadev was one of the 'endeavourers' in this matter, not one of the 'avowed ones'. In this matter Gandhiji was not insistent beyond a limit. And that is why, though no such category was overtly accepted many workers who had not formally taken the vow of celibacy could stay as those endeavouring in the matter. Gandhiji himself had to make a good bit of an effort for celibacy. He could advance towards his ideal of it, through a firm resolve, truthfulness, and courage in clearly stating his minutest emotion to people and through constant vigilance. He had shuddered when at an advanced age, during a sickness he experienced mental aberrations only for a few minutes. But he always advised his co-workers how to behave in this matter. The brief advice, contained in a post-card, given by Gandhiji to Sanmukhlal Shah, a non-co-operator from Valod, showed the perfect maturity of his penance :

"The following things are essential for *brahmacharya* (perfect continence) 1) Stay in a solitary place, 2) light food, 3) healthy reading, 4) constant contemplation, 5) very heavy physical and mental labour, 6) abstinence from spices and intoxicants, 7) avoiding amorous sights in dramas, etc 8) inward aloofness during any contact with women, 9) refraining from being alone with one's wife or any woman, 10) chanting of *Ramanama* or of any such other *japa*."⁸

A letter written by Gandhiji to Mahadev in July 1921 when the latter was in Allahabad, suggests the occurrence of an incident which both considered as a breach of celibacy in married life. It was as clear as day that the incident was during the time when Durgaben had her first child. And it was also clear that both had considered that incident a 'fault'. And Gandhiji had even recommended a long code of conduct to be saved from such activity. The excerpt related to the incident is given below :

"I read what you said about yourself. What has happened is a distressing thing. It is plain how we come to make mistakes. The right atonement will be never to repeat the thing again. But I suggest this : on every Ekadasi day, have only one seer of warm milk -80 tolas and nothing else. Not even fruit or sugar. Drink the quantity in two or three meals, not one. Continue this for one year from the next Ekadasi onwards

"Read the writings of Shri Rāyachandra and reflect over them. Read Tulsidasji's *Maniratnamala* and reflect over it. Read Bhartrihari's *Vairagyashataka* and reflect over it. Pursue very carefully the chapter on *Vairāgya* in *Yoga Vasishtha*

"Spin daily for not less than one hour, concentrating the mind on the thought that this *yagna* may wash away uncleanness from you. This too, for a year, with exemption during travelling and illness.

"All other work in the morning to be attended to afterwards. After you have, on getting up, cleaned your teeth and answered the call of nature, if you feel the urge, prayers if you are in the Ashram and then, half an hour's silent reading as above, followed by spinning for one hour. Everything else to wait.

"For the duration of the year, always go to bed before nine and never remain in it after four. You may change all this when ill.

"Though prescribing this atonement, I neither magnify your lapse, nor minimise it. You may drop from this any item you feel like dropping. Do not drop spinning out of a feeling of shame. Do not let any such feeling or the thought of public service hold you back from going to bed at nine. And do not let *The Independent* stand in your way. It is not necessary that one, writing for a daily, should keep late hours. In any case, the lines along which we propose to run it, requires you to do no such thing.

"Remember that the hour and a half outlined above is to be a time of silence. Devdas started reading your letter quite

innocently not knowing what it might contain, and then I did not think it proper to stop him.

"The reasons you have given against your coming are quite sound and you need not, therefore, come. If Panditji sends for you or Joseph, asks you to go and you come over, that would be a different story. I do not mind your not coming, though I would have been happy if you had come.

"Though I have seen your error, please don't feel that my love for you is any the less on that account. If I were perfect, there would be no room for any deficiency in me. Being myself an imperfect man, yearning for liberation, I would be only increasing my imperfection if I magnify other's lapses.

"I have suggested that you daily remind yourself of your lapse but the feeling of dejection must not remain. Sin makes a long face. Memory of uncleanness may induce humility in us, but never dejection.

"Keeping an even mind in happiness and suffering, applies to this situation too."⁹

What Gandhiji described as 'wrong' was not a deviation from the right path in marriage. If that was not the case Gandhiji would not have said, 'I am not considering your fault as something serious,' he might have written about it in *Navajivan*, and possibly Mahadev might have thought of leaving Gandhiji. Unfortunately the letter written about this episode by Mahadev to Gandhiji is not available, or else the facts would have been known. The more important thing was that his attitude is made known, the words of tribute by Chhaganlal Joshi are worth mentioning :

"As a family member and an Ashramite, I could say that Mahadevbhai had become totally free from sin by considering his smallest mistake as large as a mountain, confessing even his trifling faults publicly and atoning for them, wherever necessary."¹⁰

There is another similar letter received when Mahadev was released from the Hindalga prison. It is worth noting that both these incidents took place when Durgaben and Mahadev met after a long separation.

But in this incident which occurred after 12 years, Gandhiji's attitude is more to free Mahadev from feeling badly rather than giving a code of conduct. Here are two pages from Mahadev's diary of 22nd November 1933 :

"This morning he told me by calling me after the prayers. 'I have read your letter. I was pained. In this I feel it is my mistake because with a club and rug I am insisting on something that is not possible. In your case the position, why

do you restrain yourself?' is right. I cannot say that you both do not try. And so it is your duty to act according to your nature and your inherent quality. Your duty is to live the life of a householder. There are men who live restrained lives as householders, to beget issue, and who consider other's wife as a mother or a sister, mentally, physically and vocally, I bow to them. It would be enough if you can do that. . . .

"It is easy to understand the duty of a pure householder's life. Many have been known to have been householders while wives lived. They do not relish that life at all once they become widowers. What did the Paigamber do? He took eleven years old Ayeasha for a wife. Simple Arabs gave her to him. With every wife he had extra spiritual inspiration. He surrendered to nature, but freed all the other women of the world from fear, by himself marrying so many wives. This is my personal meaning. Shibli has no part of it. Those who, engrossed in their wives, can remain disaffected by other women, are also laudable.

"So I have three suggestions for you. You must serve in the girls' school, though I feel that it should be handed over to a married man observing celibacy. If I am not grossly mistaken Narandas is such a person. The Kishorelal couple has adopted this attitude easily. I am charmed with Gomti. The way she wore herself out in Bombay — looked after the smallest need of all — I was really astonished. Second suggestion is *Harijan* — to look after both the English and Gujarati editions by staying at Poona or Ahmedabad, wherever necessary. The third suggestion is to look after the work of Village Industries Association in Gujarat, living in a village. These are three independent tasks.

"There is no merit in imitating me by staying with me. Yours is a pitiable condition. All your letters are confessions which means that you have lost your self-respect. While you will roar like a lion if you live a life suited to your nature."¹⁰

Another thing worth noting was that after this correspondence not a single one of the three programmes suggested by Gandhiji became a part of Mahadev's routine. He remained where he was. In the words of poet Ushnas :

"Oh Self-sacrificing Ascetic ! Worshipper of Mahatma's feet :

And in those feet you have stayed silently, suffered and enjoyed everything—."^{10a}

Another question should be discussed in this context. Was Mahadev ever involved with other women? The answer to that

question depends on the meaning we attach to 'involved with women'.

Mahadev was universally attractive. His strong body, delightful face, a constant sweet and cultured language, his pleasant humour - all these attributes were such that it made his personality a charming one. Many people experienced a feeling of friendship at the very first meeting.

We have already mentioned an episode when a girl tried to seduce Mahadev in Bombay on the day prior to his LL.B examination. If we accept that that woman was not of an extremely perverted nature, it would have to be accepted that it was Mahadev's attractive personality which encouraged her to go to that extent. It was Mahadev's fear of being sinful which brought him unsullied, through that episode.

There was a reference to about four such episodes in the article written about this matter by a discreet gentleman, Kishorelal Mashruwala. Mahadev had entered deeper waters in one incident. This author knows a bit more about that episode Mahadev himself had referred to this relationship before the graduates of Gujarat Vidyapith and confessed about it with sorrow. Prior to that he had also undergone a fast for it for self-purification. He had advanced quite a bit in this case, but was saved from a total fall. "I was saved only because I thought of Durga", was what he told his dearest friends. And the author had heard this from Durgaben. Some things about this incident were worth noting. The primary point was that the woman made advances towards Mahadev. That woman had raised emotions of sympathy and pity in Mahadev's heart by repeatedly talking over a long period about her misries. Even in this episode Mahadev stopped at a particular point. And he related with remorse the incident to Gandhiji and his closest associates. He also underwent a fast. Because of that very attitude of remorse he had made a public confession.

The author can confidently point out another thing from the information he has had. And that was that the act of remorse had helped the purification of both of them. That woman's life was entirely transformed since then. She, who had gone on a wrong path quite often before, guarded herself and others strongly for the rest of her life. She became a woman who served others and spent her long life in the service of the country. Mahadev himself became like gold having come out of the furnace of this episode.

In the incidents that took place with foreign women, the women had tried to take advantage of Mahadev's gentle nature. Mahadev stopped both of them from crossing the limits. Mahadev had retained

a friendly feeling for one of them even after the incident. The other woman was of an aggressive and perverted nature. When she tried to cling to him, Mahadev had pushed her off with a kick. That woman also indulged in much public calumny, and disappeared after abandoning Gandhiji's company as she was disappointed in her carnal desires. This episode became a subject of jokes in Mahadev's circle of friends in which he also participated.

But the following sentence written by Kishorelal Mashruwala is poignant and meaningful :

"He was not fortunate enough to possess the absolute purity of Hanuman. But he had achieved sufficient character to be able to withstand infatuation for women. This was not, of course, achieved except with much difficulty, mental struggle and remorse. But all this greatly enhanced his natural humility."¹¹

Mahadev's bosom friend Narahari said about the same thing .

"He . . . was able to preserve the purity of his body. I can bear witness to his having been able to wash off his mental sins by his tears of remorse. He could not claim to possess cent per cent purity like that of Hanuman. But his sense of fidelity was not less than that of Hanuman. His fidelity towards his wife was as intense as that towards his master."¹²

The question that can arise here is about Durga's attitude in the matter. Mahadev had not forced upon Durga the vow of celibacy though he thought about it himself. He himself had not reached any definite decision in the matter, so the question of enforcing it on Durga never arose. Both had thought about it and both were trying to practise it. But it was affection for Mahadev which inspired Durga's life in that direction, just as it was devotion to Gandhiji which inspired Mahadev. Moreover the impression this author had about Durga was that celibacy was not that difficult to practise for her as it was for Mahadev. The effect of Mahadev's personality on the women who came in contact with him was stimulating, while Durga, who was equally handsome, had a pacifying effect on men. And so at times, during such incidents, Durga did feel irritated though having full confidence in Mahadev's fidelity. At times she did give vent to irritation with daughters like Vanmala Parikh and Anandi Asar, but that anger did not last long. Durga's personality was as serene as an ocean. We can as well debate here whether Mahadev was unjust to Durga or not.

In a manner of saying, Durga's condition was like that of Ramayan's Urmila. Mahadev's work kept him away from Durga. And so Durga's life passed in continually waiting for her husband.

and humming the song, 'My nest of love is empty - all empty', whilst doing various routine tasks. To that extent Durga's dream of living a happy contented life with her husband, was not realised. And she played tunes of separation on her heart strings.

It was also a fact that Mahadev's was the larger share than that of Durga in major decisions of life. It was Mahadev's decision to leave legal practice and service, to go and work with Gandhiji. It was also Mahadev's decision that if they were to join Gandhiji they would have to live according to his ideal and be firm in the vows he suggested. Even in the matter of residing at the Sabarmati Ashram, Maganwadi or Sevagram, the decision was made considering the convenience of Mahadev and Gandhiji. The son had taken the decision whether he should go to the usual school or not — it was not Durga's decision.

But the story of injustice by Mahadev ends here. And in all these decisions the beginning was made by Mahadev. Durga, after much thought and discussion agreed regarding every decision — not by being forced, but gladly — which point should be considered. And regarding many decisions Mahadev might have had trouble, but Durga accepted them easily. For Durga a life of toil, exertion and self-restraint was not something difficult. It was easily acceptable.

Whenever Durga and Mahadev met, Mahadev filled that time with love. For days together Durga ruminated over it.

Durga developed an uncommon intellectual capacity because of Mahadev's companionship. And that is why the vast difference in the degree of education became a lot more tolerable for both of them.

Mahadev's sacrifice was a matter of pride for Durga, never that of complaint. And so when it was her turn to go to prison Durga happily did so. She had shown readiness and enthusiasm like that of Mahadev when there was a talk of going to the border and die for the programme of the Peace Brigade.

FOOTNOTES

1. CWMG - 44, p. 68
2. Mahadev Desai, "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol.4, p. 248
3. CWMG - 21, p. 399
4. Ibid, p. 399
5. *M. D.'s Diary* - 1, p. 108 (Guj.)
6. *M. D.'s Diary* - 18, p. 14 (Guj.)
7. *M. D.'s Diary* - 17, p. 316 (Guj.)
8. Mahadev Desai, "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol.4, p. 182
9. CWMG - 20, pp. 333-34
- 9a. *Shukra-Tarak-Sama Mahadevbhai*, p. 94 (Guj.)

10. *M. D.'s Diary* - 19, pp. 187-88 (Guj.)
- 10a. *Shukra Tarak Sama Mahadevbhai*, p.3
11. Narahari Parikh, *Mahadev Desai's Early Life*, p. 35
12. *Ibid.* pp. 34-35

CHAPTER XXXIX

MAHADEV — BEST OF SECRETARIES

Gandhiji had nothing that was personal or secret and so the word 'Private' was used only to indicate the intimate connection Mahadev had with him. How could there be any difference between personal and public matters of one, whose life was like an open book ?

The definition of the word secretary, when in context to Gandhiji, considerably transcended the ordinary concept. How could the secretary be a mere adviser or a person handling merely the office work; for a person in whose life the house and office are inseparable, and where both these — the home and the office — become places of self-offering ? The very relationship that Mahadev cultivated with Gandhiji, erased the traditional idea of a secretary. The relationship was that of a devotee, which had at the end resulted in similarity and unison. And so they were like one soul in two bodies. Rajaji had described Mahadev as Gandhiji's spare organ which was certainly a more fitting description than secretary.

Secretaries of great men feel arrogant. At times, the sand heated by the sun scorches more than the sun itself. But Gandhiji valued humility, not arrogance. And so one had to think not how arrogant would Gandhiji's secretary be, but how humble ! Actually 'secretary' is a word of the elite; it does not suit Gandhiji's ascetic culture. Only the word 'devotee' suits Mahadev.

The field of work for Gandhiji's secretary was not limited to the office, and the office also was not limited to any one field. His office used to move about with Gandhiji and his range of activity did not end with papers, files and accounts.

It was a path to penance. And moving on that path was like walking on a sword's edge. Mahadev repeatedly said that to become an inmate close to Gandhiji was as difficult as living on the mouth of a volcano.

There was no post-office at Segaon and so Mahadev stayed at Maganwadi and did not go to Segaon with Gandhiji as we saw

earlier. But this did not lessen his work, on the contrary, the work of a postman, delivering the post daily to Bapu, walking the five and a half miles' distance from Maganwadi to Segaoon and back only added to it. Gandhiji's post did not only mean its bulk — though the bulk became so much that later on, the Postal Department had to open a special sub-post office at Segaoon. The mail contained a lot of variety — variety of languages, subjects and styles. There would be the most serious questions with serious discussions about spiritual matters, there would be political documents about the burning political questions of the nation, and there would be vicious, dirty matter abusing Gandhiji. Some asked for remedies for their ailments, suggestions for the deliverance of the country. There would be complicated problems regarding the Viceroy or the Muslim League, there could be problems of disagreement with Khare, Nariman or Subhash Bose. Beginning with post cards with one or two lines, there could be lengthy letters of 80 to 100 pages. There could be letters from the crazy, the wise, and the over-wise. Mahadev's first job was to classify these letters after a quick review. Some letters had to be given to Bapu; to some letters he himself would reply after discussions with Bapu and taking his suggestion. Many letters would be replied to by Mahadev himself. Some would be handed over to Kanu or Babla for the replies. Regarding some letters, an inquiry elsewhere might be required before sending the reply, some had to be sent the same day even with a late fee, some had to be replied to by telegrams.

Letters which abused directly were thrown in the waste-paper basket — specially because the writers did not give their names or addresses. Angry letters were answered with affection. Mahadev himself said about that correspondence :

"Scores of letters daily arrive in Gandhiji's mail from people of all stations of life, all religions, all provinces of India, and different parts of the world. No body has sorted them out for classification into useful and useless, relevant and irrelevant, to the point and rambling, considerate" or inconsiderate, short or diffuse, in a charming and legible or disgusting and eye-straining hand, sweet or bitter in tone. But the fact stands that our mail contains letters of all these types."

The filing work was given to assistants, but important or private matters were consigned only to Mahadev's memory.

The next job was writing articles. This work continued even during tours. The readers were used to Mahadev's weekly letters from the days of *Navajivan*. Moreover, if an article had to be written after studying a subject, the task normally went to Mahadev. He used to show all his articles for *Haryanbandhu* or *Haryan* to Bapu

before sending them for printing. Gandhiji also showed his own articles to Mahadev. This prevented the repetition of any subject; the thoughts got clarified and there was no discordant note in the writings. After going to Sevagram Narayan, almost daily, was a witness to the same incident. Mahadev would ask a question in a happy excitement on coming for lunch from Bapu Kutī, "Come on Babla, tell me, what must have happened today?" So Narayan would promptly speak out his first guess, "Kaka, from your pleasure, it seems that Bapu has taken one of your articles as his own," and Mahadev would contentedly say, "Perfectly right. He scratched out only at one place — Bapu wrote M K.G. after scratching out M D.!" To merge his own name in Bapu's name, even to wipe out his own name, was Mahadev's greatest pleasure. The article under Gandhiji's name, "To Every Briton" published during the talks at the beginning of the 'Quit India' movement was one such article where the initials had been altered.

Organising Gandhiji's interviews was a major task. Once Gandhiji left Wardha and went to Segaon, the number of visitors had somewhat decreased. Because to reach there and come back, one either had to walk ten-eleven miles or take a *tonga* (a carriage drawn by horses) and spend money. But even then the visitors were not a few. For some, Mahadev would go to the station to receive them, bring them to Maganwadi for tea and snacks, or a meal and then take them in a *tonga* with him to Sevagram. Those who wanted to understand Gandhiji's way of thinking, but did not want to take too much of his time, discussed instead with Mahadev. Some talked with him in detail after meeting Gandhiji. 'Bapu's beloved children' did not allow Mahadev to interfere. But later on Gandhiji sent some of them to Mahadev. Mahadev sometimes got fed up with those who would go on and on over a point, would not wind up the talk and go on arguing for argument's sake and his face expressed this annoyance. But only for a short time Mahadev could summon patience with any overpowering person by the very thought that it saved Bapu's time.

At times he had to deal with angry visitors. If Mahadev became certain that such visitors were going to waste Gandhiji's time needlessly, the unpleasant task of refusing them permission to meet him also devolved on Mahadev. One such visitor threatened to shoot Mahadev as he was leaving. In reply Mahadev only smiled, Durga remained apprehensive for a couple of days.

In Sevagram in Bapu Kutī, a small board was hung just behind Gandhiji's seat. There was a very useful threefold advice written on it: 'Be quick, Be brief, Be gone'. When the interviewees did not show any sign of leaving after their time was over, even after Bapu's

glance at the watch, Bapu would himself point at the board and laugh loudly with his toothless mouth.

Gandhiji's secretary was not only careful about not being wasteful, but he was economic in the use of things and money. Gandhiji wrote on the reverse of used paper, at times he used a *babul* thorn instead of a pin, he would use a pencil till it could write no more. Gandhiji set an example of how a simple life could be charming and adorable through his own life. In that atmosphere how could his secretary think of big expenses? But Gandhiji's and his secretary's economy was not without discretion. When the need arose a special train was arranged by the Viceroy for Gandhiji to enable him to reach Bombay from Simla to catch a boat for London. When it was necessary, he sent a telegram as long as an article. Otherwise brevity in telegraphic language was Mahadev's special virtue, another lesson he had learnt from Gandhiji. In many of his telegrams Gandhiji added only one extra word, 'love'. In those days one word cost one anna. Gandhiji earned invaluable human warmth through spending that one anna.

At times talks with people differing in political fields or those of opposing parties became more difficult than the quarrels nearer home. But in such matters Mahadev was known to present Gandhiji's thoughts clearly and even when there were complications he would see that the negotiations continued.

The people who respected Gandhiji and yet differed from him on some matters, appreciated Mahadev for a special virtue. They were sure that if they expressed their difference to him, he would put them before Gandhiji in a better manner than they themselves could. People like Rajaji, Vallabhbhai and Jawahar also had appreciated this talent.

Thus this best of the secretaries had to undertake many activities in the day-to-day life.

Very often people wonder how Mahadev managed to do so many things by himself.

When work becomes a philosophy, it inspires more energy than the ordinary type of work. Mahadev's every moment was dipped in his devotion and hence his work attained the strength of a philosophy.

He was very systematic in his work. He concentrated entirely on Gandhiji's work and so was saved from the dissipation of strength which would occur because of a roving mind.

Mahadev had an extraordinary speed in reading and writing. Even amidst Gandhiji's stormy programmes, he maintained a scrupulous regularity in his own work, and so he could utilise every moment. For instance, he used to spin regularly. In the later years,

he used the spinning time to teach his son, Narayan. He regularly went for walks and recited the whole Gita whilst walking. Thus he doubled his capacity to work.

Mahadev's extraordinary memory gave him the competence of a computer. There is a false notion prevalent that he wrote his diary at the end of the day, but it was not so. His diary mainly contained notes of Gandhiji's talks, letters and speeches. He made those notes during the day as and when Gandhiji spoke. It was only rarely that he wrote from his memory. Quite often if he did not have paper readily available he would jot down notes in the margin of newspapers or write on some rough papers. At times he jotted down words of the conversation on his nails. Later on he wrote down proper notes.

A person who does not postpone today's work to the next day — increases today's value manifold. Mahadev had mastered that art. That was the secret of his accomplishing such a lot of work.

In the *Harijan* periodical of 1946, Pyarelal, who had worked with Mahadev for years as Gandhiji's secretary, and who had to take up the burden after Mahadev's death, wrote an article as a tribute to Mahadev. He has given a number of detailed instances and has said that Mahadev was the ideal person to be Gandhiji's secretary. Pyarelal relates what that ideal should be :

"His ideal secretary must have no interest save how best to serve his master's ideal. . . . He must efface himself completely, merge himself in the master without, however, losing his personality. He must become in short, his alter ego — autonomous but in perfect unison with him. This is the central requirement."²

At the end of the article published in two instalments in *Harijanbandhu*, Pyarelal, after supporting his idea with many examples, writes :

"Shri Desai's was a consecrated life characterised by a rare single-minded devotion to Gandhiji and his ideals. Gandhiji lived for the world but Shri Desai lived for Gandhiji. . . . the late Shri Mahadev Desai was not a mere occupant of an office, he was an institution. His office began and ended with himself."³

FOOTNOTES

1. Mahadev Desai, "Day to Day with Gandhi", Vol. 8, pp. 62-63
2. Issue of *Harijan* 10th February 1946
3. Ibid. 14th April 1946

CHAPTER XL

THE ROSE IN SACRIFICIAL FIRE

Gandhi Seva Sangh did not have the responsibilities of conducting any particular constructive activity. Its main purpose was to help the workers towards purification of thought and mutual affectionate relationship. Most of its members were life-long constructive workers engaged in constructive work, but its main activity was the holding of yearly conferences. Gandhiji's expositions, workers' open-minded discussions, early morning voluntary physical work by all the workers — known and unknown — and an informal give and take — these activities made these conferences memorable. Amongst all these, the one in Kumari Ashram at Hudli village in Karnataka in April 1937 and another in Delang village at Orissa in March 1938, became especially memorable for Mahadev. The Conference in Karnataka for its pleasant memories, and the one in Orissa for its unhappy memories.

The place at Hudli selected for the Karnataka Conference had to be changed because of unexpected rain. The venue of the sessions was shifted to the rooms built at Kumari Ashram from that of the straw cottages of Hudli. Suddenly the natural scenery changed. Small rivulets started flowing at a number of places on a land over which dry, red-coloured earth was spread earlier. The delegates to the Conference had to wade through fast-flowing rivulets to reach Kumari Ashram from the original Conference venue. Around the Ashram and around many of the village compounds, creepers of wild roses were proudly displaying themselves even in face of that torrential rain perhaps because they were wild.

During that Conference there occurred specially memorable events for Mahadev. They were the marriage of his younger sister Nirmala and the sacred thread ceremony of his younger brother Parmanand and his son Narayan. In the same place Manuben, Harilal Gandhi's daughter and Gandhiji's granddaughter, was also married.

Gandhiji and Kasturba, as well as Mahadev and Durga were officiating as the elders of the two girls for the marriage ceremony. That morning Mahadev had made Parmanand and Narayan recite the *Gayatri Mantra*. He had explained the verses of the 12th discourse of the Gita to both of them. The marriage and the sacred thread ceremony were very simply performed. Both the bride-grooms, Surendra Mashruwala and Ishwarlal M. Desai, had come without any relatives. The whole ceremony cost very little. Both the bridal couples and the 'twice-born' boys were given a copy of the *Ashram Bhajanaivali* and *Anasaktiyoga* by Gandhiji. Gandhiji autographed each of these books with apt words. In the *Bhajanaivali* given to Narayan, Gandhiji had written: "Understand the meaning of all the *bhajans* and memorise them", and in the *Anasaktiyoga* he had written; "Fulfil the hopes that have been nurtured about you." Narayan believes that the other five must also have cherished these words of Gandhiji's blessings throughout their lives as he had done. Just as the words written in *Anasaktiyoga* had given inspiration to him at various periods in his life, they must have done so for the others too. Gandhiji had helped to elevate the individual as a human being by respecting him as an individual. On this occasion Gandhiji had also given a few words of advice to the newly married couples and the two boys purified by the sacred thread.

But the Gandhi Seva Sangh Conference, held in 1938 at Delang village in Orissa had agitated many friends who had attended, including Mahadev.

Aware that this Conference was being held near Jagannathpuri in the Puri District, Kasturba, Durgaben, Velanben Laxmidas Ashar, Kher Saheb's mother and some others had also joined this trip. The arrangement at the Conference was excellent. The attendance also was considerable. But the crowds that came daily from far off places for Gandhiji's *darshan* were really unusual. Every day, the field specially retained for those who came for the *darshan* used to be full before dawn. A slightly high stage had been erected at one end of the field. Gandhiji was asked to come to this stage, leaving his work, once in the morning and once in the evening. Generally people used to come and quietly sit down in the field. The volunteers took care to see that no one kept standing in the field when Gandhiji came and stood on the stage. A crowd of thousands used to sit quietly. They would greet Gandhiji with folded hands. Some sat with folded hands throughout the period they were there. There was no question of a lecture or words of advice. Even loud calls such as *Mahatma Gandhiki jai* were not uttered. The crowd would get up and start walking towards their villages as soon as Gandhiji turned to go to his hut. In the evening people started collecting in the field two to

three hours before the time of Gandhiji's arrival. Without speaking, only through *darshan*, mutual *darshan*, these people and this saint, acquired internal strength. This tranquil devotion of the people of Orissa astonished everyone.

Gandhiji addressed the workers at the Conference. Occasionally he also spoke to a large assembly. Of these occasions a special one was the opening of the Khadi and Village Industries' Exhibition. He emphasised the point of the entry of Harijans to the temple and said,

"The temple of Lord Jagannath has the reputation of being the most famous in India, for there all human distinctions are supposed to vanish, and all sorts of people, *brahmun* and *pariah*, brush shoulders with one another, vying for the *darshan* of the Lord and even eat His *prasad* out of one another's hands. But evidently it had outlived that reputation and the description had become a fiction, for the priests would not admit Harijans, but throw them out of the doors of the Lord of the World. I said to myself that so long as these distinctions of high and low endured before the very eyes of the Lord of the World, that Lord was not my Lord, that He was the Lord of the *brahmuns* and the *kshatriyas* who exploited His name and kept Harijans out, but certainly not the Lord of the World. My ambition of restoring its old reputation to the temple is yet unfulfilled, and you have to help me in fulfilling it. So long as the doors of the Jagannath temple are closed to the Harijans, they are closed to me as well."¹

Let us read in Mahadev's words the sad story that followed. He wrote in the leading article of *Haryana* in its issue of 9th April 1938:

"The story is tragic and personal. My wife, who rarely attends the annual meetings of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, came to Delang, especially, I was told, with a view to being able to go to Puri. And Gandhiji told me that I should make every arrangement for her going to Puri. Personally I disliked her having come for the sake of Puri, and had no heart to make any arrangements. I was once again asked if I had made the arrangements, and asked a third time. The question whether to enter the temple or not should have been discussed after going to Puri. But the discussion did not take place. On the very first day in the course of his exhibition speech Gandhiji made it clear that the temple of the Lord of the World was not open to the Harijans, and so long it remained so, the Lord was not, in his opinion, the Lord of the World, but the Lord of those who fed and feasted under His shelter. I had hoped that this speech would be a warning to all, including my wife, though I had a fear that she would go into the temple. She has never accepted

untouchability. She helps the Harijans according to her capacity. Harijans have been coming into our house for the last ten years. I felt that after all this if she has faith in going to the temple, how can I undo that faith? I must also confess that I had a lurking suspicion that Gandhiji's repeated insistence on my making arrangements for her going to Puri sprang out of the depth of his *ahimsa* — the *ahimsa* that had made him serve liquor to tommies in the Zulu Rebellion, and to serve meat to his friends at the table in South Africa! I had also hoped that because she was going there with a number of other friends, including Gandhiji's second son, Manilal, she would not go into the temple when the rest stood out . . . As for Kasturba Gandhi I must say that I had assumed she would stand out and her presence would perhaps act as a check on my wife and others. (These were the mixed feelings I had at the time. My wife was also aware of Gandhiji's generosity of heart.) But as it happened, my wife went in, another friends went in, and Kasturba also went in. Manilal fell ill and so could not accompany the group to guide them. Some members of the party stayed out, including my little son who put up a plucky fight with the *pandas*.

"On Monday evening when they returned and Gandhiji knew the whole story, he was sad. He had a sleepless night. (In the morning his blood pressure had shot up alarmingly.) He called Kasturba, my wife and me to account. The explanation, part of which is contained in the above, failed to satisfy him. It even irritated him. He held that I was primarily to blame. He held that I should have explained to them the history of the movement, how Gandhiji had gone to Puri in 1934, how violence was organised there, how he had to undertake the Orissa Pilgrimage on foot, how reformers were warned not to go to the temple until Harijans were admitted, and if my wife still did not listen, Gandhiji's assistance should have been sought, and if then too she insisted on going she should have been free to go. He held that I had not been watchful enough and that I had thus been unjust to him, my wife, myself, and to the cause. . . .

"His health was not such that I could argue with him for long — the extended argument might give him further pain — though today I feel that had I argued, his pain might have diminished and the agony that we both went through might have had been less. Gandhiji had also insisted on my going to Puri. I told him plainly that I had a feeling of revulsion for it. But had Gandhiji told me that I might harbour that revulsion

but that I was being sent not to enter the temple but to carry the torch for the Harijans, it is likely that we would have been saved from all the anguish. But how could even the Lord of the World undo what was destined?

"I became aware of Gandhiji's agony. In the evening the pain had increased. The next morning, I expressed my anguish and shame before the members of the Sangh. . . . Gandhiji might have wanted to hold back any mention of this episode to the members of the Sangh, expressed his pain to them on the 30th, as I had talked about it in the morning prayers:

"I am glad that Mahadev has told you something about what has happened, and now that he has said something I feel like saying out all that is in me. The various items of constructive activity that you are doing are only outward expressions of truth and *ahimsa*. It is my daily prayer, as it should be the prayer of you all, that if untouchability does not perish, it were far better that Hinduism perished. This prayer found its most poignant expression during my Harijan tour which the principle objective was the opening of the temple entry or not — though Travancore has shown that they do desire temple-entry — but it is our *dharma*, and I declared day in and day out that whoever believed in the removal of untouchability should shun temples which were not open to Harijans. Now, how could I bear the thought of my wife, or my daughters having gone to such temples? — and I felt humbled and humiliated when I knew that . . . two *ashram* inmates . . . had gone into the Puri temple. The agony was enough to precipitate a collapse. The machine recorded an alarmingly high blood pressure, but I knew better than the machine. I was in a worse condition than the machine could show. The Gita teaches us the lesson of detachment, but that detachment does not mean indifference to shocks of this kind — failure in duty on the part of one's dearest ones. The three who went there were least to blame. They went in ignorance. But I was to blame and Mahadev was more to blame in that he did not tell them what their *dharma* was and how any breach would shake me. He ought to have thought also of the social repercussions. I felt humbled. I would have felt elevated had Ba not entered the temple. But I came down. I felt as if the strength with which my work was going on, was destroyed. They were ignorant, I know, but we are responsible for their ignorance and it is the reverse of *ahimsa* not to disturb their ignorance.

"Then there are the Harijans themselves. How are we to carry conviction to them that we are with them through thick

and thin, that we are completely identifying ourselves with them, unless we can carry our families — our wives, our children, brothers, sisters, relatives — with us in our programme of the removal of untouchability ?”²

In the same article Mahadev described his own condition :

“This pouring out of the agony of his heart was for me an added agony. He was so disconsolate. What could I do ? the thought of my having been the cause of the collapse tormented me. If I was guilty of a grievous error of judgment, how could I continue to serve him ? How could I correctly represent and serve the Harijan cause ? What right had I to be his door-keeper ? On the other hand, I also felt that Gandhiji’s anguish was more than necessary. Why should he think himself humbled ? Does the sun become less bright because clouds surround it ? I had a hell of a night, and in sheer desperation I wrote to him a note imploring him to release me. This exasperated him all the more and made the cross heavier to bear.”³

Gandhiji gave a strong and stinging reply to Mahadev’s farewell note requesting permission to leave him :

“What a gift so early in the morning ! But if one mistake is not corrected immediately, it will lead to a succession of others. All the same I will tolerate thousands of mistakes but I can never part with you. Even death at the hands of a *bhakta* is preferable to salvation at the hands of those who have no love for one. There is, therefore, no question of your leaving.

“Now I will list your mistakes :

“I don’t blame Durga or Velanben at all. Ba has already made atonement; not by fasting but by confessing her lapse to me with utter simplicity. She thus made holier yesterday, our holy relationship of over fifty-five years.

“But what did you do ? Either your negligence or your blind love for Durga let her do a wrong thing. And afterwards when you come to know of my pain, you started a fast without thinking. Fasting is no remedy for thoughtlessness or wrong-thinking. The remedy lies in right thinking ! When I came to know about your fast, I tried to dissuade you, but to no avail. I advised you to think carefully instead of fasting. You did not do that. You did not even try to understand my point of view. Yesterday I asked you very tenderly whether you had understood what I said. The reply you gave then was not proper. Your behaviour was still worse. Had my words yesterday their intended effect, you would have gone today to Puri, with a band of workers and would have shaken up Puri.

But perhaps I myself was not sufficiently serious, otherwise I should have thought of this right in the beginning. If your duty is as clear to you as daylight, I would even grant a day's leave and also let you take along with you anybody who might be ready to go. This may be done even today if it is possible. . . .

"Your poetic imagination sometimes blinds you to reality. There is nothing but cowardice in your letter. If you decide to leave me will Pyarelal stay on? And if Pyarelal leaves, will Sushila stay? Of what use to me is her extraordinary intelligence? She has such intelligence that it sometimes pains me to think that it will rust if she stays with me. Why does it not occur to you that I could let all of them go if I let you go? They will all run away. Lilavati will simply go mad. I will suffer even that, if such be my lot. But I will never send away you or anybody else. And yet how can I prevent anybody from running away? Let this incident inspire poetry in your heart. Correct your error if you see that you have made one. If you cannot see it ask me to explain it to you. If you think that I have committed any error, correct me. This is no time for crying or fasting. You should read less, but think more. Study carefully all that has been done here. You yourself should utilize Sushila's and Pyarelal's talents and thus lighten the burden on you. Take work from Lilavati too. This incident shows me that being crushed under the weight of external activities, you think less. Thereby you will be able to do much less by way of 'interpreting' me."⁴

In the above-mentioned letter Gandhiji's hard-heartedness is evident in good measure, but his softness is also not hidden, in that letter he had knowingly or unknowingly given an argument, which touched Mahadev to the core. He reminded Mahadev that if he left, Dr. Sushila would also leave. How could Mahadev even dream about Dr. Sushila leaving Gandhiji when he was not well?

After Mahadev gave Gandhiji the note asking for permission to leave, he talked about the matter to Durga and Narayan. He told Narayan, "Babla, we will go to Dihon. I will farm and teach you." Babla gave him a point blank refusal, "You go if you want to, I am not going." Durga also did not support the idea of leaving Gandhiji.

In the end of the above mentioned article, the thoughts that helped Mahadev to reconcile are given:

"All this was too stunning for words. I felt that Gandhiji who has performed several spiritual operations using the chloroform of love, had performed this one without that chloroform. In resentment I cried:

'To live with the saints in heaven is a bliss and a glory,

But to live with a saint on earth is a different story.'

"May it not be that he had made a mountain out of a mole-hill ?

"But who am I to judge ? As I write this I feel that I was perhaps too dense to probe into the working of his highly sensitive mind. And after all he who had devoted half a century of vigilant endeavour to the pursuit of truth and *ahimsa* should be trusted to judge the situation better than I, ever liable to be swayed by passions and desires. What may appear to me to be trifles may be matters of life and death to him. I realized that however difficult life with him may appear sometimes, separation would be still more unbearable. He disclaims saintship. He claims to be no better than the smallest of us. I realised that I had grievously erred in associating even in thought, those doleful lines with him. Whether he is a saint or a mere mortal, like all of us, I see that my cry for separation was a fit of frenzy.

"And after all is said and done, one thing stands out in bold relief — Gandhiji's uncompromising love for the Harijans and his anxiety to lay down his life for that cause. The poignant utterance became a call to greater dedication for the cause. The incident burnt into everyone who attended the Sangh meeting this year, that no one shall tamper with that most important item of the constructive programmes and that every one shall be wide awake. The week of retreat in sacred Orissa became more sacred with the cleansing effect of the electric shock that Gandhiji gave them, and the members went home with a message that they are not likely to forget easily."⁵

When this author wrote about this incident of Gandhi Seva Sangh which occurred twenty-five years ago in Delang Orissa, in his book of memories, *Sant Sevatan Sukrita Vadhe*, he had made only the following note : "Jhaverchand Meghani gave the heading, 'A Rose blooming in the Sacrificial Pyre', to the article he wrote about papa on his demise. That heading was proved word to word by this incident."⁶

FOOTNOTES.

1. CWMG - 66, p. 414

2. Issue of *Harijan*, Vol. VI, No. 9, dated 9th April 1938

3. Ibid.

4. *CWMC* - 66, pp. 455-57
5. Issue of *Harijan*, Vol. VI, No. 9 dated 9th April 1938
6. Narayan Desai, *Sant Sevatan Sukrita Vadhe*, p. 61 (2nd edition)

CHAPTER XLI

SOMETHING BEYOND A SECRETARY

The trials and tribulations experienced at Jagannath Puri might have adversely affected Mahadev's physical condition, but the effect on his conscience was like that of gold passing through fire. He became more purified and his internal strength increased thereby. His routine continued as usual after the day in Delang when he declared his wish to leave Gandhiji, and Gandhiji, Durga and Babla refused to accede to his wish. An element of prayer might have had increased in his work, his seriousness may have gone deeper, but the amount of his daily work did not lessen at all. There was no bitterness or sorrow in his speech, his charm had not diminished even by an iota, his face was as bright and happy as ever.

Babla, by that time, had become a member of Gandhiji's 'Secretariat'. The work of training him had been added to Mahadev's work, which he did and handed over some of his own assignments to him. Mahadev was happy that Babla did not enter the temple at Jagannath Puri because it was closed to the Harijans and conducted some discussions about it with the priests there. And so he encouraged Babla to participate in discussions with some people out of all those who came to see Mahadev. Once whilst going to Allahabad from Benares in a car he had included Babla in a discussion about violence and non-violence with Bansidhar Raj, a young revolutionary from Orissa. After this interview there was a mention about him even in the articles written by Mahadev for the *Harijan* periodicals. That revolutionary gentleman had specially attended Narayan's marriage, years later at Cuttack, to bless him. Gandhiji also appreciated Mahadev's method of training his son. Occasionally he did say that he liked the way Mahadev was grooming Narayan. Gandhiji had removed Mahadev's hesitation about spending the nation's money for his son, by ordering him to keep Babla with him during all his journeys.

Mahadev was indeed a postman taking Gandhiji's post to and from Maganwadi to Sevagram, but sometimes he also became a porter. Gandhiji asked Mahadev to bring some necessities from Wardha if the weight was not too much. "There are no fruits here, what I should give Khan Sahab?" would be the plea for bringing fruits. Even there Gandhiji's instinct of a *bania* expressed itself. He wrote in a note to Mahadev from Sevagram :

"Send fruit with Ganpat. . . . The stock of apples is exhausted. I have of course spoken to Kanu for the oranges, as that man Satyanarayan fleeces us. His bill was exorbitant. I have paid it. Do the oranges cost four rupees a hundred and bananas eight annas a fifty? In spite of having been told not to, he has sent the fruit again. I have returned it. This is just for your information."¹

An English woman named Miss Mary Ingam came to Gandhiji. He sent her to Maganwadi. Gandhiji named Mary, Shantaben. Shantaben was returning to England in a few days, but she liked Maganwadi's atmosphere so much that she decided to stay on at Wardha for some months. Shantaben used to help in Mahadev's office work and teach Babla some English.

In those days Bhansali was also staying at Maganwadi. Mahadev believed that Bhansali had seen the manifestation of God and hence he had tremendous respect for him, which he had passed on to Babla. Bhansali's attitude and experience of considering body and soul as separate entities, was just wonderful. Once he developed a number of abscesses, repeatedly, in the armpit. The abscesses were very large. They were so full of pus and blood that it was awful even for those who saw it. But Bhansali was quite indifferent about it. He went on spinning on the big Bardoli Spinning Wheel for the whole day. Mahadev almost dragged him to the Civil Hospital at Wardha. The Civil Surgeon said that the abscess would have to be immediately incised and cleaned. Bhansali was ready for it. He did not need any anaesthetic to make that part of the body numb. The doctor was feeling apprehensive at piercing that big abscess, not Bhansali. He got the whole thing incised and cleaned whilst standing. Occasionally in between he would say loudly, '*Prabhu, Prabhu, Narayan, Narayan*', and then would give a loud laugh. Otherwise he was not at all bothered by the physical pain. After going to Sevagram, Babla had taken training for a long time from Bhansalikaka.

There was no dearth of snakes and scorpions in Wardha. Sevagram. You could say that one who came to stay there was not considered a 'graduate' till he was bitten by a scorpion. Once Durga

was stung by a scorpion. She went on singing *bhajans* to make the pain bearable. Gandhiji wrote in a note to Mahadev :

"I have learnt a new thing from Druga: That the remedy for scorpion-sting is a *bhajan*. What kind of scorpion would it be that permits one to sing *bhajan*. And what a singer she must be who can sing a *bhajan* despite the pain of a scorpion-sting?"

Lilavati Asar, who had gone to stay at Sevagram, had some dispute with Gandhiji for some reason. She left Sevagram. Gandhiji had written notes to many people about her leaving Sevagram. But as he had guessed, Lilavatiben came straight to Maganwadi from Sevagram. Mahadev did not allow her to go any further. Gradually, he involved her in his own work. Gandhiji also was satisfied that only Mahadev could absorb Lilavati. Lilavati taught some book-keeping to Babla.

Gandhiji was elected as the President of the 12th Gujarati Literary Conference held at Ahmedabad on 31st October 1936. At that time Mahadev had given an excellent address as the Chairman of the section on Journalists. That address contained many suggestions that could make Gujarati journalism lively and also showed the amount of study Mahadev had had of national and international periodicals as well as of his thinking on the subject. Many listeners wondered how Mahadev got the time to read the latest literature about journalism when he was putting in an average of sixteen hours' work with Gandhiji !

This was the first time when Journalism was featured in a Gujarati Literary Conference. Mahadev concluded from it that the Conference had recognised journalism as one of the aspects of literature. He reminded the people of Ruskin's altering the definition of the word 'book' into 'literature' : "What I am writing is the truth, it is helpful to the people, it is nice. Whatever is written with this understanding is literature."

And then Mahadev put forth a question as to how much of our literature can fit into this definition of literature! He mentioned a number of scholars who practised journalism according to this profound definition. How could Mahadev discuss any subject without mentioning Gandhiji? In the beginning itself he had said that if Gandhiji had been invited to be the Chairman of this section, he would have given many suggestions for journalism. Mahadev reminded them that Lord Rosebury had given a simile of the Niagra Waterfall to the newspapers, and said that Gandhiji had said without knowing about this simile :

"Newspaper is a tremendous power. But just as an uncontrolled waterfall can submerge villages and destroy crops, the uncontrolled cascade of a pen can also destroy. If the

control is external it could prove more vicious than no restraint. The restraint has to come from within."

In his address Mahadev gave a sense of value to journalism that though the newspaper is a business, a means to earn, a trade, it can also become an invaluable means to protect people's welfare if a proper effort is made. And if that happens it can be a necessary aspect of people's lives. Mahadev insisted on the value of correct news and had given some instances of how vitiated contemporary journalism had become. He also said that as journalism caters to public opinion, it also forms and guides it. He had explained that devotion to truth was the first duty of a journalist and had also explained how this very essence is destroyed by exaggeration, false enumeration and sheer rumours. Referring to the papers that merely maligned and castigated others, Mahadev said that to give even instances of these would appear as slander on paper. He supported Ruskin's advice of passing news through a sieve of truth and presenting it in its pure form, which could be nourishing to the soul. He expected to see deeply knowledgeable articles along with items of correct news and gave examples of superior and inferior articles. He criticised heavily the obscene advertisements in the newspapers.

Mahadev divided the editors and reporters in three categories: 1) Those who only reflect people's opinion; 2) Those who help to formulate that opinion; and 3) Teachers of the people. And then regretted that in comparison to the editors of the first category, we have very few journalists of the other two categories. Taking the editor of *The Guardian*, C. P. Scott, as the ideal, quoting him, Mahadev stated that such a nation-building editor who is a teacher to the people, must possess excellent skill, education, culture, sharp intellect, devotion to duty and truth. Specially referring to two Indian editors, Mahadev placed Tilak as a teacher of the people and Gandhiji as a nation-builder. Towards the end he pleaded that journalism was a sacred and serious occupation. We have already seen how ably he edited *Young India*, *Navajivan*, *The Independent*, *Haryanbandhu* and *Haryan*. And so it is easy to understand that Mahadev's address to the journalists in that conference was a result, not confined to a few quotations collected from some books, but was that of the essence of the experiences of excellent journalism, benefiting the people and devoted to truth.

During this very time Mahadev made a commendable contribution to literature. He translated Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* into Gujarati. It is indeed a puzzle how he found time to translate that 650-page volume. During this time of translation, work with Gandhiji did not decrease a bit. After finishing his other work he translated the text either at night or early in the morning.

Once he had made his younger brother Parmanand read every sentence in the original English in the light of a lantern, so that he could immediately write the Gujarati translation. No doubt, he got help from Narahari, Thakorbhai Desai and one or two other colleagues for this work. But ultimately only Mahadev had to see and correct the translation done by other friends. This author found that Mahadev himself translated more than half of the book. Narahari and others helped him to finish the rest due to pressure of time. All the English poems quoted in the book were translated into poetry by Mahadev himself. He had at times rewritten some paragraphs translated by his friends. He wrote about the translation .

"It was not easy to translate Pandit Jawaharlal's book. It is difficult to hold and transfer that sublime current of sentences written in English or the British into any vernacular. Moreover, I have not been able to give the time I ought to have given for it."³

Pandit Jawaharlal was with Gandhiji in Congress politics, but he was influenced in his thoughts by Marx. He was friendly with many socialists of the international forum. The members of the Congress Socialist Party considered Jawaharlal as their unofficial leader.

Many were surprised that a devotee of Gandhiji like Mahadev had translated the *Autobiography* of Pandit Jawaharlal! Two types of criticism assailed him. Those friends who believed that Jawaharlal had written a lot against Gandhiji in that book questioned Mahadev's help in its dissemination! Some people known as socialists expressed a doubt that Mahadev might colour the translation with his own Gandhian thoughts. Jawaharlal gladly gave the permission for the translation. He accepted Navajivan's appeal not to accept royalty for the translation and once the translation was done he often expressed his view that among all the translations of the book, the Gujarati translation was the best.

Considering all the criticisms that he received, Mahadev thought it necessary to write a preface to his translation. He translated it into English and sent it to Jawaharlal. Panditji accepted Mahadev's right to write such a preface and welcomed it.

In a preface of fourteen pages Mahadev has indeed written the reason for his finding it necessary to translate this book but he has also unfolded his skill as an excellent critic. In that preface his love and respect for Pandit Jawaharlal are manifest, while on the other hand it is also clear that he is not ignorant of the limitations of the book he had so carefully translated.

Mahadev has said, "It is neither any dissemination against Gandhiji, nor a challenge to Gandhism . . . (It) is a salutation to

Gandhiji, full of over-flowing love and devotion . . ." Mahadev defines Jawaharlal's criticism of Gandhiji as 'stiff' and 'at places bitter beyond measure'. But he has also said that Panditji by that criticism had given 'invaluable contribution' in understanding Gandhiji's philosophy.

About the book Mahadev said that it was a history related by Panditji himself of the extraordinary evaluation of his day-to-day growth. Mahadev also said, "The notes of the British Empire have not been known to have been read since many years in the stiffest yet extraordinary manner in which Panditji has done it." He compared some pieces of analysis as being in the "fiery yet discerning style" of Burke. Having done this he reviews the book objectively. The first point he makes is that the previous heading which had been thought of for this book 'In Jail and Out of Jail' would have been more appropriate than 'An Autobiography'. Because the book was a bit unbalanced from the view of an autobiography. Mentioning the contrasts indicated regarding Gandhiji in the preface, Mahadev asked, "What about the queer contrasts about Gandhiji? But where does the fault lie? In the thing itself or in the eyes of the beholder? In the mirror or in the angry, agitated face in the mirror?" "Whether non violence will take us to our final aim or not?" Mahadev quoted the above and said, "Here lay the difference between Gandhiji and Panditji. The reason clearly is his western education. . . In his book there are a number of quotations from the western writers, but there is no impress of our extensive literature." He went on to say, "He still retains the effect of the ancient Greek-Cyrian philosophy and so he dislikes the known and likes the unknown." Mahadev said at the end of the preface "In spite of doubts, Panditji has faith, in spite of resenting the traditional form of religion, he is religious deep within. Every page of his book says, 'Where the ideals are bright and resolves are unshakable there cannot be failure. Real failure lies in the rejection of principle.. ' " He also discusses the similarities in Gandhiji and Jawaharlal.

"An American journalist, a lady, asked me a question, rather sarcastically, 'Is there any similarity between Gandhiji and Jawaharlal?' I told her, 'Yes, the burning desire for truth, fierce patriotism and the strength to renounce everything for both of the above principles.' The superficial differences disappear in these similarities. But I did not think of telling her about another similarity. The quality of keeping on developing every minute is also the same in both of them, both have the same love for each other, both are followers of *Karmayoga*, and so even if there are some differences due to nature and tastes, it is on the whole beneficial for the country."⁴

Gandhiji wrote to Mahadev on seeing the preface :

"I have gone through your preface. It is no doubt good. No changes are called for. I have therefore made very few. Whether the reader will be able to digest it is a question. Let us however leave it at that."⁵

Mahadev's personality by that time had transcended the secretaryship as well as that of an Ashramite. When he came to stay at Sevagram, a mud-house was built for him just behind Bapu Kutī. At that time Krishnachandra looked after the Management of the Ashram. He must have asked Gandhiji about Mahadev's inability to join in a number of activities of the Ashram. Bapu wrote to him : "Mahadev may not be looked upon as an inmate of the Ashram. He cannot be spared even for a minute for community work. Pyarelal's case is slightly different, but he too should not be pressed."⁶

In that one body resided the many faceted personality of a secretary, journalist, personal assistant, worshipper, and a lover.

During the Congress Session of December 1936, held at Faizpur in Khandesh District of Maharashtra, Gandhiji was going to declare open the exhibition of Khadi and Village Industries. Mahadev was sitting on the floor near the platform. He had a writing pad in his hands and a form for sending a telegram direct to the press. Before Gandhiji could begin, Mahadev wrote the introduction. The form was all ready to be sent to the telegraph-office. Gandhiji was speaking in his own peculiar Hindi. Mahadev, translated it into English mentally, arranged the stray thoughts and wrote it, somewhat shortening the speech, straight on to the form. At the end of the speech Mahadev only had to do one thing. To sign the telegram and send it to the Associated Press. Thus the work of a reporter, a rapid writer, a translator and a peon to take the telegram were included in his work as a secretary.

Notes were taken in a hard-bound note-book if they related to a Working Committee meeting or an important interview. But the margin of those notes would be used for something else. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born in Arabia. His Urdu contained many Arabic-Persian words. If new words were used, or an out of the way sentence spoken, the margin would contain its mention. Even if the Hindi language was colloquial it would be noted down in Mahadev's margin. Many such instances were available in his diaries.

Over a long time Gandhiji was thinking about the questions regarding Bengal and the North-West Frontier Province. He seemed to regard both the areas as a challenge, in their difficult ways, to his concept of non-violence. In Bengal many revolutionaries were rethinking the concepts of violence and non violence. The Khudai Khidmatgars of the North-West Frontier on one hand, exhibited the

strength of their non-violence, while on the other tradition of killing from generation to generation was still being followed. Gandhiji hoped that the firm and quiet strength of the non-violence of the brave would generate from this area. But for a long time he was not permitted to go there. While he was troubled over these questions, he had handed over even the writing for the *Harijan* periodicals to Mahadev. Thus Mahadev's work-load further increased. Moreover, when Gandhiji himself could not go to the North-West Frontier Province, he entrusted the work of taking a trip there, to inquire into the situation also to Mahadev.

* * *

Thakkar Bapa who had dedicated his life to the Advasis and the Harijans was in his seventieth year. His friends decided to celebrate his birthday. They thought of presenting him a purse of Rs 7000/-, but Gandhiji said that it was an insult to a person like Thakkar Bapa to give him only Rs 7,000/-. He inspired them to make a purse of Rs 70,000/- and so naturally it became his responsibility to aid the collection. And Gandhiji's responsibility meant that it was also Mahadev's. Mahadev went to Bombay to collect that amount. He got extraordinary success in this work at Bombay. The resolve which seemed impossible to achieve in a short time was successfully carried out a bit earlier than expected after Mahadev's going there. On his return Mahadev did look happy but he gave all the credit for the success to 'Bapu's name and Bapu's work'.

We can note here that in March 1929 when Gandhiji went to Burma for the collection of donations for Khadi, Mahadev had a similar success. We still find people who remember those days. A gentleman told this author a few days ago "My father was then in Burma. He moved about with Mahadevbhai for the collection. Mahadevbhai insisted on going to some of those people who were known not to give any donations, and yet collected a good amount from them only through speaking lovingly and sweetly to them."

The following incident relates to the time when Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore went to Delhi in April 1936, for collecting funds for Shantiniketan Vishvabharati Institution — the donor, Ghanshyamdas Birla during that incident wrote:

"Gandhiji had come to Delhi and was staying at Harijan Niwas. In those very days Poet Laureate Tagore had also come for collections of funds for Vishvabharati. He also came to Delhi. The programme of the Poet was to display his dramatic art to people at various places and ask for funds. This pierced Gandhiji's heart. It was unbearable to him that a great personality like Gurudev should move about to collect funds in his old age, display his art of drama and dance just for the sum

of Rupees sixty thousand I regularly met Gandhiji but he never said anything in this connection. His agony was increasing. When the agony became unbearable, he talked about it to Mahadev.

"The first quarter of the night had passed. I had not yet slept. I was lying in bed waiting for sleep to overtake me. The light was put off. Suddenly I got up at hearing some steps. 'Who is it?' I asked when Mahadevbhai said, 'It is me.' Mahadevbhai came silently into my room and sat near my bed. 'Mahadevbhai, you? Why at night? Is everything all right?' 'Oh yes! Everything is fine. I want to have a talk with you.' I started to get up from my bed, when Mahadevbhai said, 'Keep lying down. We can talk while you are lying down. There is no need to get up.' I again started getting up, but kept on lying down on Mahadevbhai's insistence. 'Do say, what is the matter?' I said. That was enough. Mahadev's speech flowed on. I do not have the capacity to put it into words. It was worth hearing the power and skill with which he drew the picture of Gandhiji's agony. The whole picture danced before my mind. There was emotion, charm and power in Mahadev's speech.

"Before my mind was drawn up a touching picture of Gurudev's greatness, of our misfortune that Gurudev had to dance for some small amount of money, in his old age, and of Bapu's internal agony — and I wept. Bapu had said, 'Tell Ghanshyamdas to write to his rich friends for six of them to give Rs 10,000/- each to Gurudev and save India from this embarrassment and send him back to Shantiniketan with a relieved mind.' Mahadev repeated the above words whilst concluding his talk.

" 'Mahadevbhai, I fully understand Bapu's agony. But why did you come so late at night in this bitter cold? Bapu could have decided himself. To whom can I go to beg? Tell Bapu, that he may ask me for whatever is to be given and give it to Gurudev.' I told him this, but the credit for this decision went to Mahadev, because his quiet but poignant words did not leave the scope for any other decision for me."

* * *

A very difficult task as Gandhiji's colleague was contacting revolutionary prisoners serving long term in jail since years. After discussing and finding out that they would adhere to non-violence in public life, Mahadev discussed with the Government the possibility of getting them released. Even Gandhiji was not always successful in this work. Mahadev made a detailed note in his diary (still unpublished) of Gandhiji's interview with Bina Das.

On 12-4-38 Interview with Bina Das and Ujjwala Majumdar in Presidency Jail Both touched Bapu's feet. Bina was gentle in looks, 22-23 years old, Ujjwala slightly older Both silent and serious :

Bapu Said : Do say whatever you have to say.

(Silence for some time.)

Bapu : Have you nothing to say?

Bina : No, we have nothing to say.

Bapu : I have read your statement. Years ago I had read the gist. I read the whole statement two days ago. You have nothing to say Does it mean that you have not changed your views? Would you do the same thing if you are released?

Bina : Yes, my ideas have not changed. But whether I would act in the same way or not would depend on the type of programme the nation adopts.

Bapu : But what is the nation? Your colleagues?

(Silence.)

Bapu : All right That is a secret Then I should not ask you about it. But are you a leader or a follower?

Bina : Perhaps both.

Bapu : That is very good. Your statement gave me an impression that you have an exclusive personality And you would definitely become a leader.

Bina : Yes, I want to become one. I have not yet become one.

Bapu : But the attitude you have taken in your statement is ill-fitted to your present attitude. If you have to depend on your colleagues for whatever you are going to do, you cannot maintain your personality.

Bina : No I do hope I have a personality. I am a follower But a follower who understands.

Bapu : But suppose your colleagues declare that they are giving up violence. Will you do the same or not?

Bina : No Because I have faith in violence, and I would prefer to stay alone or find new comrades.

Bapu : Now I understand. But you know that some things change and some do not.

Bina : Mahatmaji, I do not accept that What I say is, my nation comes first All other things after that You would know the word expediency

Bapu : Yes, I know it.

Bina : We take any opportunity that we get for our work. Violence is the way of the world.

Bapu asked her age. She was 27 years old. She was sentenced when she was 21

Bina : I am not keen to be released. I have completed six years. I have got remission of one and half years. I do not want to be released earlier.

Bapu explained that he also had the same attitude when he was released before completing his sentence. She felt strengthened after these words. She said, "No, the question of release does not worry me."

Bapu : But if they know that you are going to act in the same way once you are released, will they release you? Tell me since when have you got these thoughts?

Bina : All the time. For some time, I believed in non-violence. I used to read your speeches and articles before I went to college. But then I felt that freedom cannot be achieved without violence. Have other countries not got independence through violence?

Bapu : They are in no better condition than India.

Bina : That is exactly it. No. I have thought about it and there is no possibility of a change in my thinking.

Then Bapu talked of Alipore Presidency and Dumdum Jails and said, "Do not answer this question if you so desire. But I want to ask. According to you are those people who told me that they would give up violence, liars?"

With a smile : Yes, for the nation. I do not blame them.

Bapu : You are brave. You are devoted to truth. I appreciate your courage. I had not imagined that you would be like this! Very often it is very difficult to digest truth. But you have presented even the truth with dignity. So now I would ask you, did you want to meet me? When did you know that I was going to meet you?

Bina : I had a doubt that when we were being shifted from Dinajpur it was for some such purpose. We were told today that you were coming to meet us. We were not waiting very enthusiastically. We were a bit confused. Till we came here we did not know what to tell you. We did not know whether to tell you the truth or not. But I felt that I could not deceive you, and so I cannot tell lies. Have we given you trouble?

Bapu : No. On the contrary, I am an admirer of your courage and adventure. I have met many people. But I have not met such a courageous person like you.

In reply to a question as to the treatment she received in jail, she said, "I am quite comfortable. This friend of mine wants to go with other girls. She gets bored with me. My father has a different way of thinking. He is entirely with you."

I asked her whilst getting up, "You swear about your loyalty towards your comrades, but would you give up that loyalty for the sake of the country?"

Bina : Yes

The other one did not speak anything. She could not speak English. She was asked to speak in Bengali, but she hardly spoke anything. She said that her thoughts were similar to those of Bina

Whilst leaving Bina, who had restrained all her feelings till then said, "Mahatmaji, I liked your article 'Our Choice' very much."

Bapu : In spite of my non-violence?

She : Yes.

Bapu : Will you write to me when you are released?

Bina : Certainly.

I said And maybe you may come to Segaon and change Bapu's heart or your own?

Bina : Neither is possible

I : Come with an open mind. Perhaps we may change.⁸

Amongst the prisoners that Gandhiji met, Bina Das was the most courageous and most adamant. Gandhiji had entrusted the work of meeting some others to Mahadev. The most notable among those was Sardar Prithvi Singh. Mahadev had to correspond quite a lot and visit a number of times the Governor and Chief Minister (who then was called 'Premier') of Punjab to meet Prithvi Singh and to talk about him. Unfortunately Mahadev had not kept notes of his own interviews with prisoners as he had of Gandhiji's. When a car moves, the speedometer records the kilometres it covers. The stepney which goes with the car is used when required, but is considered along with other wheels and no separate record of the kilometres covered by it is kept. With Mahadev it was something like that. Many times he went and accomplished things which Gandhiji would have done if he had time. But no separate note of his accomplishments was kept by him. He felt an honour in mingling his own work with Gandhiji's accomplishments.

* * *

Two other important assignments were given to Mahadev during this time as Gandhiji's other self. One was the Rajkot Satyagraha and the other was in Mysore.

Explaining the policy of the Congress of not generally involving itself in the issues of native states, Gandhiji had said that it was like a ringworm. It increased as you scratched it. The national leaders did take interest in the problems of the native states, but did not directly participate in their movements. Sardar Vallabhbhai was the President of Kathiawad National Conference

and so the leaders of Rajkot sought his advice in their work. Vallabhbhai kept Gandhiji informed about all that he did and whenever he was away from Gandhiji all his work was transacted through Mahadev.

We need not go into the entire history of the Rajkot chapter. Mahadev was under the treatment of a *vaid* (Ayurvedic physician) in Delhi because of his ailments, when Gandhiji went on a fast in March 1939 on account of a promise broken by Thakoresaheb Dharmendrasinhji and the machinery of his State. Mahadev could not remain silent when Gandhiji's fast began and he wrote to Vallabhbhai :

"It appears as if this chapter will kill Bapu! Haven't the saints been killed by wicked people everywhere? Bapu's statement, given today, is such that it will bring tears even to those with stony hearts. But can you expect Glens,⁹ Gibson¹⁰ or Virawala¹¹ to shed tears?"¹²

One end of the Rajkot problem was also in Delhi. The British Resident, Gibson, at Rajkot was party to complicating the problems Gandhiji had informed even the Viceroy about that. The Viceroy was on tour and returned to Delhi. He contacted Gandhiji through Gibson and suggested that the main point was of breach of promise as Gandhiji had deduced. Why should they not approach Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Chief Justice of India, for his opinion? He also informed that the Thakoresaheb had given an assurance to abide by the decision of the Chief Justice and he himself would try his best to see that the Thakoresaheb did abide by it. Gandhiji had accepted this suggestion. As Mahadev was in Delhi, he was very helpful in the presentation of the entire case of the People's Conference to the Chief Justice. Mahadev's translation of correspondence and reports of speeches in Gujarati was considered totally dependable. In this very business, on another occasion, Virawala himself specially asked Mahadev to give him an English translation of Gandhiji's speech. And amidst a load of work Mahadev sent that note to him on time. But Mahadev's work was not only that of a translator. If the Viceroy or the Chief Justice at Delhi wanted to know how Gandhiji's mind was working they sent for Mahadev! Once Mr Lethwaite, the Viceroy's Secretary, told Mahadev, "Let me tell you that I read everything that appears in *Harijan* under your signature just as I read Gandhiji's articles carefully. I do not know anyone else who explains Gandhiji's thoughts as well and clearly as you do."¹³

Sir Maurice Gwyer's decision was totally in favour of the people. But the Muslims and the Garasias (a Rajput community) were dissatisfied with the settlement. From the talk with Virawala Gandhiji felt that it was not proper for a non-violent person to do

both the things — to try to please the people on one side and to take advantage of this decision on the other. And so he decided to keep the decision aside and openly started negotiations with Virawala from step one. Many workers were disappointed at this. But Gandhiji considered this as a lesson in non-violence. He told the Rajkot workers about his attitude of taking refuge in consulting the Chief Justice instead of persuading Virawala for a change of heart.

"I proved myself of little faith. If I had staked my all on my faith in God and the efficacy of my fast in melting the Thakoresaheb's and Shri Virawala's heart, the worst that could have happened would have been my death. But it would have been a worthy death."¹⁴

Narayan, who had gone as a typist with Mahadev to Rajkot also discussed with Gandhiji his decision to reject the award of the Chief Justice. Gandhiji explained to him:

"By the Award we had made enemies of our opponents. We have to win them by love, and the way is now clear for us. Our fight for freedom is not over . . . But we are now free to carry it on in a better atmosphere and with cleaner weapons."¹⁵

In 1939 December Mahadev had to go to Mysore. The People's Party and the Diwan were casting aspersions at each other. The charges against the government from the people were of a more serious nature. Saying that those charges were false, Sir Mirza Ismail, the Diwan of Mysore, invited Gandhiji to inquire into the matter. Gandhiji himself did not go but he sent Mahadev.

Diwan Sahab did not leave anything undone in welcoming Gandhiji's representative. Four cars were waiting for him and Narayan at Mysore station. They were put up in the magnificent State Guest House. Dinners and other functions had been arranged. But when Mahadev interviewed the prisoners in a number of prisons in the State, he did not have any doubt that indescribable and inhuman tortures had been inflicted upon them by the State. Mahadev had merely to give the report of his inquiry to Gandhiji. But that report was so strikingly direct that though terribly annoyed, Sir Mirza Ismail could not defend himself.

* * *

Let us consider the relationship between Mahadev and Gandhiji. Perhaps it was very much more than that of a son and father. Mahadev was not Gandhiji's son, but he belonged to him and ultimately merged in him. To Mahadev he remained 'very Revered Bapu' till the end as he was in the beginning. Only once during his own sickness had Mahadev addressed him in a flippant way when he asked, "Why don't you write a love letter to me?" Otherwise the devotee had maintained his distance along with his keen desire to

become one with him. His desire was to put his head on Bapu's feet or in his lap at the most. Bapu may have written, "I wish to come and embrace Mahadev." But Mahadev had never dared to say that.

It looks they were totally different. For the one Sarojinidevi could easily give the simile of 'Micky Mouse' while she used to address the other as '*Gule Gujarat*' (Flower of Gujarat). Both had the power of attraction. But Bapu's was that of a different strain from that of Mahadev. Bapu's power of attraction came from the nectar of his soul and his skill acquired from his vast experience. Mahadev's power of attraction was from his 'God-given' elegance and his charm from his love-drenched speech.

Bapu was erudite, or you might say he was one who was always searching for pearls in the form of truth. Mahadev was a devotee. He was always swimming in Bapu's abundant love. Bapu's action as the desireless action arising out of a soul wedded to truth. Mahadev's action was like a clear cascade of water flowing out of a heart full of devotion. Bapu was an ocean of experience and hence the chief author of aphorisms. Mahadev was an annotator, thirsting for experience. Bapu was an original thinker and a teacher using original language. Mahadev was an expounder, interpreting Bapu's original thoughts to the people in simple or scientific language. Bapu was so much interested in Truth that without Truth he found life bitter. Mahadev found Truth through the sweetness of life.

Bapu's entire personality was severe like the afternoon sun of the summer months. Mahadev's personality was gentle like the full moon. Bapu had shaped Mahadev's entire personality. But did Mahadev have any effect on Bapu?

If we think about this question with reference to other great contemporary personalities, we might understand it better. Suppose Mahadev had been working with Rabindranath, Sri Aurobindo or Tilak? But he did not go to any of them — he went to Gandhiji. Mahadev's contribution in making Gandhiji what he was, was quite substantial.

There was a definite effectiveness in Gandhiji's writings after meeting Mahadev. The language of *Hind Swaraj* and *Experiments with Truth* is the language Gandhiji used for his two basic books, and the change would be evident when we compare these two. Christian Bartlof from Gandhi Centram, Berlin, had told this author in an interview that on studying Gandhiji's writings, it has been clearly evident that after being in Mahadev's contact his language had become softer and more precise. The people in the west find it easier to understand Gandhian thought because of Mahadev's writings.

Mahadev also had an effect on Gandhiji's emotional life. And that is why he said when Mahadev was there, that "Mahadev enhanced the prestige of the Ashram", and after his demise he said, "All of six people cannot fill the lacuna created by him."

Mahadev did the excellent job of supporting Bapu's thoughts on one hand with the help of the ancient works like Veda and Upanishads, and on the other hand, with the help of old and new literature of the world.

Quite often Mahadev also put before Bapu the thoughts of those opposing him by further clarifying them. Rajaji had specifically noted this point in his tribute Bapu also got Mahadev's help in explaining his opponents' thoughts to him Mahadev had become friendly with the Personal Secretary to the Viceroy. And Gandhiji said in the Gowalia Tank meeting of August 8, 1942, that the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow had fallen in love with Mahadev. Virawala, the Diwan of Rajkot, was more comfortable when he talked with Mahadev than when he did with Gandhiji. With him the work progressed only when Bapu's truth and Mahadev's charm combined.

FOOTNOTES

1. CWMG - 64, p. 45
2. CWMG - 67, p. 343
3. Jawaharlal Nehru : *Marj Jeevankatha*, p. 17
4. Ibid p.16
5. CWMG - 64, p.140
6. CWMG - 72, p. 87
7. *Shukra Tarak Sama Mahadevbhai*, pp 95-96
8. The whole incident from M. D.'s unpublished diary
9. Political Secretary - Rajkot
10. Resident, Rajkot
11. Chief Advisor to Thakor Saheb of Rajkot
12. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshri-na-Patro* -4, p. 141
13. *M. D.'s Diary* (unpublished) dated 12-11-1940
14. CWMG - 69, p. 273
15. Ibid p. 283

CHAPTER XLII

THE GLITTERING FLAME

The period of five years between the Provincial Ministries that the Congress accepted and the time it gave the call of 'Quit India' was a period of tremendous political changes for the nation as well as the world. A number of volumes can be filled if the nation's history of this short period is written. We are concerned only with the fact that Mahadev's Bapu was playing a decisive role at every step. Mahadev who followed Bapu's every step was widening his own horizon.

In November 1936 temples in Travancore were ceremoniously thrown open to the Harijans. Gandhiji described it as the first step for the purification of the Hindu religion. In December of the same year the Congress Session was held in a village named Faizpur on the river Tapi in Maharashtra. Thereafter, in the elections to the Provincial Assemblies which gave a right to vote to three and a half crore people, the Congress got a clear majority in six provinces. There was a difference of opinion amongst the senior leaders about accepting office; but when Gandhiji took an undertaking that the Governors would not interfere through their authority in the administrations of the Governments until and unless there was an emergency, the Congress decided in July 1937 to form the government. When it was suggested that Mahadev should be Minister in the Bombay State he brushed it aside with a smile. To him being a Secretary to Gandhiji was any day superior to a ministership of any Government. He saw his duty as well as his fulfilment therein.

The Congress had appointed a high-level committee named the Parliamentary Board to solve problems relating to Legislative Assemblies. Its President, Sardar Patel, used to consult Gandhiji on every matter. Vallabhbhai always considered himself a disciplined soldier and so keeping himself in the background he gave importance to the Congress or the nation. The work of the Parliamentary Board was quite difficult. Inexperienced workers had

to look after administration. Arrogance and envy at times raised their ugly heads as power was distributed.

Three big issues were raised because of the sharp differences in the Congress: the Nariman issue, the Dr N. B. Khare issue and the Subhash Bose issue. Sardar Patel had borne the direct impact of all the three issues. But all the three had ultimately gone to Gandhiji. Gandhiji found that in all three issues justice was on Sardar's side. Both Gandhiji and Bahadurji as arbitrators in the Nariman issue, gave the decision in Sardar's favour. Regarding the Khare and the Bose issues the Congress Working Committee stood by the Sardar. The details are not relevant to this biography. We need only say that after giving the other party all the opportunity for clarifying the position, Gandhiji had given his opinion definitely and clearly. Nariman had himself appointed Gandhiji as the arbitrator. But once Gandhiji took Bahadurji's help, he had conducted most of the investigations. Along with the Sardar, Gandhiji also was fairly blamed in all the three issues. Mahadev felt hurt because of that. But neither he, nor Gandhiji, thought it necessary to enter into wranglings over these discussions. Occasionally Mahadev expressed his anguish in letters.

In June 1937 Gandhiji went for rest to Tithal near Valsad, before the Congress Session at Haripura near the river Tapi in Gujarat was held in February 1938. Mahadev at that time made an unsuccessful attempt at learning cycling. He was however successful in developing a friendship with Nandlal Bose, renowned Art maestro from Shantiniketan. Gandhiji's close friend from South Africa, Herman Kallenbach also came and stayed at Tithal. The Haripura Congress was a story of pride depicting Sardar's hospitality. Mahadev had praised it to the skies in his articles in *Harijan*. And yet he did not ignore some of the drawbacks very clearly. He very clearly described them.

There was a great measure of awakening even in the native states, once the Congress took over the ministries in some of the provinces. The policy of the Congress was not to interfere with the affairs of the native states, but the Prajamandals of the native states were always eager to take guidance from the Congress and Gandhiji. Sardar and Jawaharlal took quite an interest in these matters. People's movements had taken place in Travancore, Rajkot, Jaipur, Mysore, Hyderabad and many other native states.

The Second World War, started in September 1939, became the centre of international politics. Gandhiji's premise was to morally support the allied nations, however weak, who believed in democracy. The Congress called for the aims and objectives of the

war and in the domestic area demanded a Constitution and a people's government for India.

The provincial ministries resigned in October-November 1939 as the Viceroy unilaterally involved India in the Great War without consulting any one.

The Congress Working Committee could not agree with Gandhiji's idea that the nation's defence should be taken up on a non-violent basis. Subhashbabu secretly escaped from the country on 17th January 1941, and initially he went to Germany and tried to gain Hitler's support. As he was not successful enough, he reached Japan in a submarine and formed the 'Azad Hind Fauj' — Indian National Army — and entered the war on the side of the Japanese. Some leaders like Rajaji were in favour of opposing the Japanese without any conditions. The majority members of the Congress Working Committee were ready to help the Allies in the war effort in every way, with the proviso that India be granted her freedom.

Britain believed that it was their job to decide India's future. Congress believed that the Indians had the right to frame India's Constitution.

From the time the Congress accepted power, communal riots kept on taking place in the provinces governed by it. The Muslim League, under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, adopted the attitude that it was the only representative body of all the Muslims and that the Congress was a body representing only the Hindus. Later on he formulated a principle that the Hindus and the Muslims were two separate nations. The demand for Pakistan was based on this two nations theory. The Muslim League celebrated the 22nd December 1939 as 'Liberation Day' after the Congress Ministries resigned.

The country was being burdened in a number of ways because of the war. The government had inflicted a severe censorship on the country, banning free publicity of any kind. The Congress resolved on Individual Satyagraha in October 1940, to oppose the ban on freedom of speech.

Whenever there was a movement afoot, the Congress put aside all differences and accepted Gandhiji's leadership. Only in June 1940, the Congress had released Gandhiji from the organisation at his own insistence. They called him back for the Individual Satyagraha and made him the leader. Gandhiji selected Vinoba Bhave as the first Satyagrahi and Jawaharlal Nehru as the second one. Applications to join the Individual Satyagraha started pouring in from many corners of the country. Gandhiji did not allow Mahadev to go to jail as an Individual Satyagrahi, instead he gave him the work of selecting the Satyagrahis and thus helping him. Only once,

in December 1940, Gandhiji thought of sacrificing Mahadev to Individual Satyagraha. In a talk on 18/19th December 1940, with Ghanshyamdas Birla and Devdas Gandhi, he said:

"It is a movement of self-purification, not for embarrassing any one. As such, I must sacrifice my best. I needed Mahadev out for various other noble missions. This has enhanced his value further. But all the more reason, therefore, for sending him in, since the sacrifice will be still greater."¹

On 24th December 1940 Gandhiji wrote a letter and appealed to Adolf Hitler :

"I, therefore, appeal to you in the name of humanity to stop the war. You will lose nothing by referring all the matters of dispute between you and Great Britain to an international tribunal of your joint choice."²

The British Government suppressed this letter.

In April 1941 communal riots broke out in Ahmedabad. Gandhiji sent Mahadev there as a soldier of peace.

The Individual Satyagraha was suspended in October 1941. In March 1942 the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India, amidst a lot of fanfare, with a proposal for India's future. The Congress spent days deliberating over it, but Gandhiji rejected it the moment he saw it. Later on almost all the parties of the country found the Cripps' Proposal unacceptable. Whatever was to be given through this proposal, was to be given after the war, and there was also a possibility of the partition of the country in it.

In the same month Jayaprakash Narayan was caught sending some documents secretly, through his wife Prabhavati, from the Devil Camp Prison of Madhya Pradesh. The British Government used this incident to make propaganda against the Congress. Gandhiji, after forbidding violence and secrecy, had told the British Government that had somebody in their country attempted something similar, they would have praised his courage.

The prisoners of the Devil Camp went on a hunger strike in November 1941. Gandhiji wired to the Home Secretary of the Government of India and asked for permission to send Mahadev to meet these prisoners of Devil Camp as his own representative. The permission was granted.

It became clear to Gandhiji, after the Cripp's visit that it would be best for the British Government to leave India. After thinking over it quite a bit, he openly gave out the call 'Quit India' to the British Government. The Congress Working Committee welcoming the thought framed the resolution in May and on 8th August 1942, the All India Congress Committee passed the resolution with an over-whelming majority at Gowalia Tank, Bombay.

During this period, Mahadev was with Bapu except for the time when he stayed at Simla because of ill-health and some visits on which he was sent by Bapu. And whenever he was with Bapu he had written his diary without fail. Many thick note-books have been filled by these fine-lettered diaries. All these diaries will be published after some years. A few instances from these have been given here to indicate the different fields enlivened by his pen.

Gandhiji introduced Vinoba to the Congress Working Committee after selecting him as the first Individual Satyagrahi and told them that all others would wait till he is arrested. At that time

Bapu Till today I wanted to start with myself. But then I thought of Vinoba. He became ready — he will go on behalf of the Congress. I will announce that only he has to go first.

Maulana : There would be a lot of disappointment. People have been given a hope. Committees have been formed. It would have been better had you considered them.

Bapu : I had no intention to send all the Committee. I want training. Selection is my work. If I tell someone to go on spinning and if I tell another to go on smoking a *bidi*, it is to be done as I say. . . . I want to show that a real Satyagrahi can do a lot, and the whole country will benefit from that. . . . There is a lot of advantage in sending a few. . . . We can send thousands but in that there is a likelihood of chaos. . . .

Vallabhbhai My opinion is that one who has to run the show must have the freedom to do it according to the way he wants. The government has got its own plan. It is waiting to round up everyone once the Congress Committee passes a resolution. Bapu's plan is not to play the government's game. Would Bapu desist after sending a few people? People were laughing at the Dandi March, but once it started the atmosphere became electrified. . .

Jamnalalji : Mahatmaji's order. One man has allowed one man. All others have been stopped. This would be very important. If we obey Mahatmaji's order people also will do so.

Jawahar : I do not understand what would Vinoba do and what would the people do!

Maulana : It is

Jawahar : I am not a fool. You cannot explain any better to me.

Shankarrao Dev : It is enough that Mahatmaji is starting the struggle. . . .

Asaf Ali : I do not want to say anything. I shall obey the order.

Jawahar : Bapu wishes that the manliness of the entire nation be limited in Vinoba, and we should all become women, take to *purdah*. Would he allow donations to be collected from the poor farmers? Who will stop him? Will Vinoba stop it?

There was an unexpected letter from Samuel Hoare. He wrote the letter and addressed it to 'My dear friend' whilst going on an important mission to Spain.

"Our religion, our culture, our way of life — everything is in danger. I consider the time, I spent with you regarding the Constitution for your country, as very usefully spent. You did not like that work. But you did not doubt my trustworthiness. Neither did I doubt yours."

Bapu wrote to him:

"I was very happy to receive your unexpected letter. I thank you for it. It has refreshed the memory of the days when we used to have heart to heart, open talks. You are passing through a stiff test. My constant prayer that may peace replace war."

* * *

Bapu and Rajenbabu had to meet the Viceroy. Their train was late by three hours and so the meeting was shifted to 3 p.m. from 11 a.m. Bapu told Rajenbabu: "You telephone Jinnah that it is necessary for us three to go to the Viceroy."

Jinnah said, "Yes, when will you come to my place?"

Rajenbabu gave him 2 p.m. as the time. Bapu hurriedly finished his massage, bath etc., and reached Jinnah's place at 2 p.m. without resting. He did not even come to the door to receive Bapu. They went in. Talked for about three quarters of an hour and went to see the Viceroy.

The Viceroy started reading from the written notes :

" . . . You must immediately decide; if you come to terms in the provinces as well as at the centre, it would not present difficulties for me to involve the Indian representative in the responsibilities." Bapu said, "It is difficult to deliberate on the declaration if you do not say something about its basis. Still we will tell you after thinking about it." Jinnah said, "I have asked for a clarification from you in the Muslim League's Statement."

. . . Bapu felt that the talks had not ended. The Viceroy got up. The attitude was most unfriendly.

On return too Bapu went in Jinnah's car — even whilst going, when Jinnah refused to go with him, Bapu offered to accompany him and went in his car, — then talked for some time at his place. On being asked on the way, 'whether he would join in the demand for freedom or not' — Jinnah said, "Freedom is an abstract quantity

And what is there in saying I want freedom? Power is the thing and I want power." A telegram was sent at night for Jawahar and Maulana to come to Delhi.

Both of them came on 2nd November 1939. There was a telephone call from Jinnah when they were talking that he wanted to talk to Gandhi.

Devdas said, "Can I give him a message?" He said, "No. It is Gandhi, your father, with whom I want a private word, and that too before I see Pandit Jawaharlal." Bapu went to the telephone after years. Jinnah only had to say, "I want to meet you for fifteen minutes, so come any time to my place." Maulana said, "Why did you not tell him to come and meet you?" Bapu said, "How can I, when my tongue cannot utter that sentence?" Bapu went to him at 1 p.m. During this period I went with Devdas to see Mirza Ismail. We explained to him that he must persuade Jinnah to be sensible. He should be told not to talk of Muslim League's exclusive claim and Congress being a Hindu organisation "Somehow get together as this is a unique opportunity in your life for you. The destiny of crores is in your hands, etc." He told all these things to Jinnah on the telephone in our presence. Then Mirza Ismail said, "He is a cantankarous brute. But he has listened to everything and it would bring good result."

We told all this to Bapu and then Bapu went to him. He returned and said, "The talks were surprising, any how we must compromise. I have no ill-will for the British. Even if we have to fight them, it will have to be through non-violence." Bapu gave the formula of the Declaration to him. He discussed it. Suggested some changes. At last Bapu said, "Now you discuss it with Jawahar. I am tired. . . ."

He met Jawahar at 4-30. After talking for two and a half hours with him he said, "I want to pay my respects to Gandhi, may I come in your car?" Jawahar brought him at the time of prayers. He shook hands with Bapu and said, "I wanted to inquire how you were. I tired you too much and you did not look well at all." Bapu thanked him and said, "Now I am all right. I got sufficient rest." Jawahar said, "The talks were really good. He is prepared to support our demand. Only he said that if the government did not accept your demand we cannot do what you might do. He is beset with a number of fears. He is afraid that there would be chaos if the British go away. How can we demand complete independence? But if there is no other responsibility he is prepared to support that demand. Then it is not necessary for all the three to go. He talked sweetly that it would be one and the same thing whether he went or Gandhiji went."

* * *

And here is a short conversation between two great men taken down by Mahadev :

Rajaji : No body has any doubts that we do not want to exploit others by getting Swaraj.

Jawahar : Then let me tell you that the impression my impression about the Indian history is that the Hindus belong to a clan of imperialists. I am talking of the entire History of India

Rajaji . Your analysis of the Hindu-genius is the analysis of your psychologic genius.

* * *

Sachha Baba came. He wrote while in silence. "Ask for something."

Bapu : God gives me every thing. He gives me food He is going to give me Swaraj. I keep my mind so happy that there is no desire to ask for anything. God comes to know, what I want and gives it to me So I would be a fool if I ask for anything from anyone. God will give me knowledge when he wishes to do so. I accept in all humility that I am a fool. Isn't it better that even that I ask from God? Everyday I ask him to remove my stupidity. I have faith that there is God¹ If I can recognise God I would have nothing left to do I would be totally fulfilled. I would be ashamed to ask for a boon from anyone else but God."

The above are a few gems from the vast mine of the unpublished diaries

FOOTNOTES

1. *CWMG-73*, pp. 244-45

2. *Ibid.*, p. 255

CHAPTER XLIII

FRAGRANCE OF THE SACRIFICIAL SANDALWOOD

"I am writing this at 2 a.m. My work has almost doubled owing to Bapu's illness. I shall have to apply for long leave for a rest, once Bapu recovers. For the last one year Pyarelal has almost been lost to us for some peculiar reasons. And I have had to carry the entire load, single-handed, for all these days. Obviously, neither am I satisfied with my work, nor are those people satisfied, for whom I do the work. And I appear much older than my age."¹

Mahadev, who seldom complained about his health to anyone, wrote the above lines, which meant that the weight of excessive work was affecting his health. Personal considerations prevented Pyarelal from undertaking a good amount of the work. Gandhiji's work did not diminish because of the change of place from the village to the city. A daily trip between Wardha-Segaon was added to Mahadev's routine. Gandhiji's illness was probably the main cause of the extra work. Mahadev invariably gave news of Gandhiji's health in the letters he wrote daily and also in the *Harijan* periodicals every week. Knowing about Vallabhbhai's anxiety regarding Bapu's health, the correspondence with him had also increased during this period. A weekly letter was also sent to Jawaharlal.

As a matter of fact Mahadev's life, which was like a stick of incense spreading fragrance through self-sacrifice, had almost come to its end. Through years of austerity and hard work, he had added lustre to his soul and wrung out the physical strength. No one could be blamed for this. It was as if a soul, fallen from the *yogic* state after finishing its work, eagerly awaited to become one with the Eternal Flame.

Over and above Mahadev's regular daily round of Segaoon from Maganwadi, he would receive a note from Gandhiji with any visitor on a cycle. It was a daily affair. The note would be either a request

for sending a *Rengi*, a cart driven by oxen for taking visitors round the hills, or informing that the stock of dates had finished. Gandhiji seldom forgot to appreciate Mahadev's successes — small or big — and Gandhiji's small notes contained this too:

"It will be a reflection on my part if you do not succeed. Vinoba, Maganlal, Chhotelal, Panditji, Kaka and Devdas have surpassed me each in his own field. You are still on the first step. Many other names occur to me. My task is to teach the *mantra* of truth and non violence. He who assimilates it may soar in his own sphere and I stand apart. You need not write the weekly notes. You must train yourself in the use of your left hand. You will be able to train it more easily than I did. I am returning Prema's post card. A cart or car will be required for Perinben tomorrow at one o'clock."²

Gandhiji was worried about the increasing burden of work on Mahadev and his failing health. And therefore suggested to him to cut down on the amount of work.

An epidemic of cholera erupted in Wardha and adjacent villages. Kakasaheb and some of his colleagues were struck down by it. Two of Kakasaheb's colleagues and a worker of Wardha Mahilashram died because of it. Kakasaheb was barely saved. Pyarelal then was struck down with typhoid, and was sick for a long time. Gandhiji followed him with a blood-pressure attack. All this resulted in added work for Mahadev.

Mahadev had to take a long leave as written in the letter to Jawaharlal, referred to in the beginning of this chapter. But that was not because he wished it, but because he was compelled to take it due to the heat of Wardha which reached between 115° to 120° F.H. But Mahadev's method of measuring this heat was in terms of its effect on Gandhiji. "This year's heat is intolerable. Gandhiji, who has an extraordinary capacity to bear cold and heat, also feels that this heat is unbearable."³

Mahadev started repeatedly feeling giddy and becoming dizzy. His old friends, Dr. Jivraj Mehta and Dr. Gilder, who had specially come from Bombay for him, examined him and ordered him to take complete rest for a long period. Gandhiji sent a note to Durga telling her that there was nothing to worry about, but that Mahadev's health should be taken care of. He would not be able to do the work he had done till then. Mahadev wrote in a letter to Jawaharlal that it was just hard luck that he also suffered from the same trouble that Bapu did. After a lot of thought he agreed to go to Simla for complete rest in 1938. Gandhiji wrote in the *Harijan* :

"Readers will be glad to know that Mahadev Desai is steadily getting better. After continuous strain of years, he was

entitled to rest. But he would not take it. I did not insist on it. Kind nature came to the rescue and enforced the rest he would not take voluntarily. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur has taken him away to her home in Simla. Surrounded by fresh air and, what is more, the loving care of Rajkumari, he is bound to recoup."⁴

Gandhiji was certain that 'Mahadev had the courage to happily die with pen in hand', if Gandhiji did not insist on Mahadev taking rest.

Durga and Narayan accompanied him to Simla. Gandhiji had written to Durga to go for long walks, but she was unable to do so because of her heavy body. Father and son 'conquered' the surrounding hillocks near Simla and daily walked from ten to fifteen miles. Many subjects were discussed for Narayan's benefit during these walks. At night there used to be Bridge sessions with Rajkumari and her niece Bery. That was probably the most restful month for Mahadev. One month's holiday in 25 years of service!

But the bond between the two souls was unbreakable. Gandhiji was on a tour on the North-Western Frontier. Mahadev would write letters. But quite often it was days before the letters were delivered. Both knew that there would be delay in the post, and both yearned for each other's letters.

When Mahadev went to Simla with Vallabhbhai during Bardoli Satyagraha, people had wondered, 'When did Mahatmaji come to Simla?' This time people asked the Mahatma in the North-West Frontier, 'Where is Mahadev?'

Gandhiji wrote to Rajkumari. "My post is going a begging. Hence for four days I am without any news from you. I know it is well with Mahadev and yet one wants the written letter."⁵

Gandhiji was resting at the North-West Frontier Province by observing silence except for his addressing meetings. He advised Mahadev to give up the keen desire to write for *Harijan*. Mahadev occasionally felt that his letters were likely to add to Gandhiji's work and so was reluctant to write. Gandhiji immediately wrote:

"... I got all your letters only yesterday. (21-10-1938). Why did you feel that your letters might be a burden to me? It is not at all so. The fact is that whenever there is no letter from you, I feel very uneasy. And if the letter is short, I get angry and wonder what could keep you so busy that you had to be content with only two lines."⁶

While enjoying that delightful scenery of the North-West Frontier Province Gandhiji thought of Mahadev, just as he had seventeen years ago, when he was charmed with Kamrup. The love between Mohan and Mahadev went on increasing with the passing of years. Gandhiji was afraid of Mahadev suffering brain haemorrhage,

which he fortunately just escaped years ago when he had fainted at Nipani (Karnataka) And so he repeatedly warned Mahadev about it. He also gave him hope that rest will give him added strength to work.

Shoeb Qureshi had asked Mahadev to stay at Bhopal on his return from Simla. Gandhiji had approved of the idea. But Mahadev did not stop at Bhopal as he was eager to reach Wardha.

It took months for Mahadev, even after coming to Sevagram to resume his normal work. His health once again took a dip in 1942. But in that critical year Mahadev would not have even thought of taking leave for rest and he would not have listened to anyone who might have suggested it. But more of this later.

* * *

Considering Gandhiji's unease described in the above-mentioned letter, a couple of questions may be looked into. Erik Erikson has analysed Gandhiji's life psychologically in his book *Gandhi's Truth*. Erikson has written one chapter on the relationship between Gandhiji and Mahadev. The problem is that Erikson has written this whole book to prove the psychological theory based on Freud and expanded in his own clinic and in his previous books. And he mainly believes that behind all human relations, sexual urges play a direct or indirect, active or latent role.

Ignorance of Gujarati language forced him to read *Mahadev Desai's Early Life* by Narahari and he interprets some of the quotations as they suit him. Another limitation is that the limited knowledge or even ignorance about Indian philosophy, as well as of our customs and traditions, makes him think only of *artha* and *kama* from the four *purusharthas* and so either he does not understand or gives less importance to the concept of *dharma* and *moksha*, actively prevalent in the lives of both Mohan and Mahadev. And so he feels the presence only of passion in Mahadev's devotion to Bapu and Gandhi's affection for Mahadev. Indian readers get this impression from Erikson's notes. And so he forces in ignorance his false ideas about Gandhi's truth in that book, which has basically been written with reverence.

Another criticism regarding Mohan Mahadev's relationship is directed by people who respect Mahadev. They ask whether Gandhiji was unjust to Mahadev or not? A genius like Mahadev might have risen far higher than he did had he not joined Gandhiji. But those, who argue thus, make a mistake. Firstly, they fail to understand that Mahadev has lost nothing in becoming a zero with Gandhiji and secondly, he had not lost his own individuality in spite of reducing himself to a zero. Mahadev had combined two great desires — country's freedom and human spiritual accomplishment in

merging himself with Gandhiji and this merger had proved doubly beneficial for him. He would have become a fine man of letters or an excellent translator had he not joined Gandhiji. Maybe, he might have become a lawyer, had it suited him and would have earned some money. But had he not joined Gandhiji, how would he have become fit to be compared to the best among human beings? K. G. Mashruwala, a man known for his prudence, called him 'a person suitable for all noble similes'. Sardar Patel, the man of iron will described Mahadev's death as 'one enviable even to Gods'. The sociologist-anthropologist Verner Elvin described Mahadev's relationship with Gandhiji as that of Plato to Socrates. An enlightened statesman like Rajaji described Mahadev as 'Gandhi's spare organ'. The multimillionaire Ghanshyamdas Birla called Mahadev an 'invaluable gem'. One of the Viceroy's Secretaries called Mahadev the best interpreter of Gandhi's thought. Many others paid similar hearty tributes to him. It is likely that Gandhiji's value became ten-fold because of Mahadev becoming a zero but it must also not be forgotten that without Gandhiji, Mahadev would have been a zero without the digit one. The value of a number divided by zero becomes infinite, in the same way Mahadev's ego had melted to a zero by his plunging into Gandhiji's sacrificial fire and as a result his individuality had increased without limit. Vajubhai Shah has aptly said about Mahadev's attitude of merging with Gandhiji that, "To merge with Gandhiji is to merge in his activities, as broad-based as the world and as fine as Truth."

People compare Mahadev's personality in various ways with regard to his relationship with Gandhiji. We may not consider the old Pauranic (mythological) comparisons of Rama Hanuman or Krishna and Arjuna. But there are three related instances known in modern history with which the pair of Mohan-Mahadev can be compared partially.

Many intellectuals compare them with Dr. Johnson and Boswell. Boswell also was an excellent writer of diaries and that is the only reason for this comparison. Pyarelal said about Mahadev in his tribute:

"It has become the fashion these days to compare late Shri Desai with Boswell. The comparison might hold good so far as passion for gathering and recording biographical material of their respective masters was concerned. But there the comparison ends. In moral and intellectual stature they were as poles asunder. Shri Desai was great in his own right. Boswell's attitude towards his master was that of an ardent hero-worshipper and a cheap and a vulgar one at that, at times. Shri Desai's attitude towards Gandhiji was that of a spiritual devotee

to his *Guru* and a lover of the motherland towards the promised deliverer. Shri Desai's was a consecrated life characterised by a rare single-minded devotion to Gandhiji and his ideals. Gandhiji lived for the world but Shri Desai lived for Gandhiji "7

This comparison is primarily between Mahadev and Boswell. If Dr. Johnson is compared to Gandhiji in the same way, it will be obvious that the two pairs can never be compared.

But another pair of the famous German Poet Goethe and Eckermann can somewhat be compared with the Mohan Mahadev pair. The relationship between these two was that of Master and disciple and a philosopher. And so possibly this pair can be compared from the spiritual and philosophical points of view with Mohan Mahadev, more than that of Johnson and Boswell. Goethe had inspired Eckermann regarding life and philosophy. But this relationship was not unbroken or unsevered like that of Mohan-Mahadev. A third pair in this context is that of Socrates and Plato, but they were not contemporaries and so they do not compare with Mohan-Mahadev. In the two pairs, German and Greek, the relationship of master and disciple, and that of the doer and the interpreter, do make them comparable to Mohan and Mahadev.

When we turn to our country we do find the relationship between Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda that of the doer and the interpreter. But Vivekananda was a disciple, not a secretary and was an interpreter of independent intellect. He was not a chronicler, noting down daily happenings in their order.

One who took down notes, who could be compared was Shri 'M' alias 'Master', who wrote four volumes named *Ramakrishnakathamrit*, totally depending on his own memory by merely listening to Shri Ramakrishna's words. He was superior to Mahadev in keeping himself in the background, because he had not even allowed his full name, Mahendranath Gupta, to appear on those books. According to Swami Vivekananda and other persons of authority, though the stories told by Shri Ramakrishna have been written by 'M' from his memory, they correctly represent Shri Ramakrishna's words. And so Shri 'M' was a chronicler of Thakur Ramakrishna Paramahansa's words, comparable to Mahadev in that respect.

All these pairs were comparable to Mohan-Mahadev's pair in a restricted sense in each case. But according to the knowledge of this author there was one and only unique pair of Mohan-Mahadev, who were two individuals having distinct intellect and yet existed as one soul in two bodies, who had similarity of language that could be exchanged, who had individual genius and yet the individuality of

one had been immersed in the other, and though fused, the exclusive genius of each was no less brilliant.

The reason for this matchless connection was exactly what Gandhiji had judged, "his capacity to reduce himself to a zero when necessary". This capacity to become a zero inspired Mahadev to sit at the feet of a very saintly being, but its unique quality arose from the manner in which he accepted Gandhiji as his master with unfailing devotion. This author was a witness to an episode which provided an example of this chaste, unadulterated devotion.

"Bezwada (Vijaywada) comes on the way from Madras to Wardha. River Krishna flowing between two huge mountains takes on an awe inspiring form. Today there is glitter of electric lights on its dam, in those days there was an unmixed natural beauty. Jamnalalji had visited Raman Maharshi's Ashram just then. He had praised the purity and peace of the Ashram's atmosphere to Bapu. Papa's heart would be touched when any saintly individual was mentioned. He started asking questions about Raman Maharshi with devotion and enthusiasm. Jamnalalji, Bapu and Papa got a subject of common interest. Bapu asked during the conversation - 'Mahadev, why don't you visit the Ashram?' Papa became very happy. Jamnalalji encouraged him, 'Yes, certainly, it is definitely worth visiting at least once and to go to Tiruvannamalai it would be convenient if you change the train at Bezwada. When you have already come this far do go this time. When will you find time again?'

Papa told me to pack up his bedding. The train had reached river Krishna's bridge.

Jamnalalji was telling Bapu, "The peace that I found in Ramanashram I could not find even in your Ashram."

Bapu told Papa after some time, "Do not make haste in returning from there. If you also experience the peace that Jamnalalji did, gladly stay on for some more days. Do not worry about work."

Bapu said this very naturally. But to remain away from Bapu for a longer time was a thought intolerable to Papa. He turned to me and said, "Babla, undo the bedding."

I was stunned. Bapu also looked with astonishment. He asked, "Why Mahadev, why are you telling Babla to undo the bedding?"

"I have given up the idea of going."

"Why?"

"One master is enough for me."

Kanaiyalal Munshi has rightly said that Mahadev's attitude towards Gandhiji was like that in the Gita, "Abandon all duties and come to Me, the only Refuge."*

FOOTNOTES :

- 1 M. D.'s letter to Jawaharlal at Wardha, 15-1-1936 from Correspondence of Nehru Museum.
2. CWMG-66, p. 246
3. *Harijanbandhu*, Vol. 26, p. 169
4. CWMG-67, p. 425
5. CWMG-68, p. 32
6. Ibid. p. 32
7. Pyarelal, *Harijan*,
8. Narayan Desai, *Sant Sevatan Sukrut Vadhe*, pp. 105 to 107

CHAPTER XLIV

AN ENDLESS POEM OF DEVOTION

Jamnalal Bajaj who was termed as his fifth son by Gandhiji was a man of prayer and penance. He suddenly died in Wardha on the 11th February 1942. Mahadev experienced a terrible shock on the demise of a close companion of his larger family consisting of Bapu's devotees. It slightly affected his daily routine as well. His adherence to the daily recital of Gita intensified. He was seen reciting the Gita whenever he got a little free time. Ma Anandmayee Devi came to Wardha after Jamnalal's demise. Jamnalal had tremendous respect for her. Ma Anandmayee had affection for Jamnalal. In a conversation Ma said somewhat off-handedly, "Another great man will go like this in the next six months." To Mahadev 'great man' meant only one person, and so he was terrified that this prediction was about Gandhiji. Mahadev, who had asked the question, innumerable times, 'how can I live without seeing Bapu?', was constantly praying in his heart for Bapu's long life. Those were the days indicating the advent of the 'Quit India' movement. And so he was busy taking down notes about the daily interviews of national and international leaders with Gandhiji.

He wrote to Sardar on the 9th March :

"My health is better. But the eyes clearly reflect the fatigue which is still present. So I have stopped writing for *Harijan* and other periodicals for the present. I take a hip-bath as you do. I also use mud-poultice and have a massage. I feel ashamed to get all this done. But what else can I do? I must take this nursing if I want to get up and do Bapu's work ..."

And this time 'Bapu's work' meant preparations for a struggle. This had become quite clear for the year and a half.

Once this author criticised the father, 'Papa you do not write anything original! Translations of Bengali, of English, and even the periodicals, it is all in Bapu's language. What is your original work?'

Mahadev laughed. He said at first, "I have handed over original writing to you."

After some time he said :

"I do have plans to create original work! Plots for six novels are ready in my mind. I also want to write a book in English on 'Non-violence in World Literature' But how to find time? I can write it down if the Government gives me a long vacation."

From that day Narayan kept a pile of blank papers in the luggage whilst touring, so that if the Government gave a long vacation, any time, Mahadev could use that pile for service to his mother-tongue.

While returning to Wardha from Calcutta he once again fell sick. Both Gandhiji's worry and Mahadev's embarrassment increased. In those days Mahadev was not prepared to go anywhere away from Gandhiji. But Gandhiji persuaded him with difficulty to go to Nasik arguing that he would have to become fit for the approaching struggle. That was a Sunday Gandhiji took to silence after seeing Mahadev off from Sevagram. His weekly silence started on Sunday evening and lasted upto Monday evening. Mahadev had a second attack at Wardha station, and was barely saved from collapsing. Colleagues wanted to take him to the Civil Hospital but Mahadev insisted on returning to Sevagram. At that time a telephone had newly been installed at Sevagram. Colleagues, who were with him, phoned from Wardha and asked as to where to take him. Gandhiji wrote that he should be brought back.

The whole Ashram came to know that Mahadev was returning on account of a heart attack. The house that is called 'Mahadev Kutir' today was filled with anxious, affectionate friends. Even in silence Gandhiji left his 'Kutir', walked twenty-five steps to the North and came to Mahadev Kutir to sit beside Durga. The car brought Mahadev right upto the courtyard. Immediately on his arrival Bapu laid Mahadev on the bed made for him and took his head on his own lap. Stroking his hair, Bapu broke his silence and uttered only one sentence, 'How are you feeling now, Mahadev?'

Gandhiji had kept two exceptions since the time he took the vow of silence : If he was having an unbearable pain or if someone else was suffering, he would then break the silence. He was not known to have broken the silence ever for his own pain. But he had broken it fifteen years ago to console Santokben when Maganlal Gandhi died. This time the silence was on a Sunday. So he once again went into silence and ended it at a later hour on Monday.

Mahadev replied to Bapu's inquiry about his health, "What if I die now? My prayers have been answered. During all the time on the

way I had only one prayer. I want to die with my head in Bapu's lap."

Bapu had already resumed silence. Whilst stroking Mahadev's hair, his fingers and his love-drenched eyes conveyed a great deal.

Probably it was that affectionate look that cured Mahadev swiftly. And within a short time he took up the usual routine. One after another, the days passed so fast that except Durga, if anybody else worried about Mahadev's health, it was not even noticed.

Mahadev was beset with an added anxiety. The method and the form of the coming struggle was gradually taking shape in Gandhiji's mind. This time he did not want to allow the Government to have a game of cat and mouse by its arresting people and releasing them at will, by putting one worker in one prison and another worker in another prison, by imposing a fine on some and not on others. If the call to the British was 'Quit India', the programme for the nation would have to be 'Do or Die'; and so thinking on these lines Gandhiji was deliberating to go on a fast, immediately on being arrested. This thought was intolerable to Mahadev. He was afraid that if Bapu undertook a fast, the British, who were losing battle after battle in the war, would not care to preserve Bapu's life. Mahadev was trying to persuade Bapu not to go on a fast as soon as he was arrested, and Gandhiji was deliberating whether to take or not to take water during his fast unto death. At times, he went to the extent of saying, "I would have to dump myself in jail like a bag of cement — completely inert — if movement on my part is needed, I would have to be lifted for it."

Mahadev, who had said, "I have surrendered to Gandhiji with the prayer 'Lead Kindly Light' ". could not in any way accept Gandhiji's thought of a fast. His heart found it intolerable and his head unthinkable. He forgot about his own health. Sleep eluded him at night. This was the only subject for discussion with his colleagues in the Ashram. Kishorelal, Swami Anand and Pyarelal all agreed with Mahadev that Bapu should not plan to go on a fast unto death immediately on going to prison. He could persuade all of them to write to Bapu opposing this idea. The result was that there was a one-sided correspondence seldom seen between the Generals and the Commander-in-Chief, engaged in a war. In those letters on the 27th and 28th July, Kishorelal wrote that if strength was to be displayed through death it should be done with a philosophy, not with logic. Faith without philosophy was no faith at all. There should be a clear idea of the method and occasion for inviting death. And it should coincide with the ideal of the entire life. If death was invited for the destruction of the British Government, then that death would produce only that strength of destruction, then non-violence, absence

of enmity towards the English people and opposition to the Japanese would become secondary. Moreover, any step that will produce distress and hopelessness, the strength derived from that step could never remain non-violent. The leaders of the Congress would be satisfied easily, for which fasting was not necessary. The dissatisfaction was among the silent workers outside and the people. It was not their time nor did they have the strength. When the proper opportunity for the sacrificial offering would draw near, it would be so apt that even a child would grasp its inevitability.

Pyarelal said that he had not become uneasy because he believed that no harm will be done to Gandhiji in this chapter and that there was a need for some very strong non-co-operation. It was the time when not only the struggle, but happenings after the struggle would be more important. So if Gandhiji went away in the beginning of the struggle, the struggle was likely to become lifeless. When Britain was in danger, its intellect was incapable of understanding a speedy and a gigantic step of a fast. In the slogan of 'short and swift' for the struggle, seemed to indicate an impatience. Gandhiji should start the struggle on a big scale and then be relaxed. Very few people were ready for the fast, and few even among those that were ready, were fit for it, there was a likelihood that a rift might take place between the supporters of the fast and those who oppose it.

Swami Anand's letter was a bit coloured with political argument. If Gandhiji, he said in sheer excitement, sacrificed himself, the Government would get what it wants specially when it was hatching an unclean conspiracy against him. The circumstances were that a fast might be counter productive, unlike the fast preceding the Communal Settlement. The generosity Bapu has shown towards the English people throughout his life would be lost if he sacrificed himself through excitement. The British would be dubbed as Jews for ever in such circumstances. No one was in agreement with Gandhiji in the Congress Working Committee. The Congress had lost its fighting spirit. The resistance to the British should be maintained, it should be made very strong and widespread. A programme for an active non-violent revolution should be put before the country. But the idea of a fast unto death appeared to be irrelevant.¹²

Mahadev's letter expressed his deepest feelings and explained the height of pathos which was the cause of the end of his life later, and so almost the entire letter is given here.

"Very Revered Bapuji,

"Since the last seven or eight days I wake up between one or two o'clock at night and toss about, unable to sleep for about

two to three hours I was thinking of writing to you when yesterday we had a talk with Vinoba. I was astonished at his one sentence, 'I think all this is as it should be.' I kept quiet as I did not want to divulge my pain before the whole crowd. On the previous day you told Devdas and me, 'All this is going to happen, you will not see me alive.' I was quite agitated at that time. I felt that it was the impatience to see the result which was responsible in making it short and swift through the fast and I felt that you are indifferent about the fact that the world may or may not understand the significance of your stand. But I was really astonished when you put up your plan to Vinoba.

"You seem to feel that just as soldiers die, not with thought and knowledge, but out of sheer discipline, in the same way we can tell thousands of people that we can die whilst fasting not with knowledge but through faith. I do not see any resemblance between the two situations. The soldiers have been trained for years to kill, their minds are so conditioned. Their hatred and feeling of disdain is greatly developed, and material to instigate their killer instinct is provided to them. It cannot be said that we have been trained to die through fasting. Inordinate patience and non violence, which is very rarely seen, is required to be able to die by inches.

"You are greatly mistaken if you think that you have opened the way for the people by relaxing all the conditions other than non-violence for the oncoming struggle. Many people came when there were certain conditions to be fulfilled, not because of the conditions, but because they wanted to come. It is a delusion to think that a lot of people will come because the conditions have been removed. And to put a condition that people should die without food and water — you may call it an ideal and not a condition — is almost impossible.

"It is impossible because to die by inches requires not only faith and desperation, but also knowledge and intense feeling. I would clarify! Why are you ready to die? Because you feel it in every bone of your body that it is impossible to live under this government. We cannot say what we want to say. The communication media is in their hands, which they can shut down at their will. You cannot tolerate the all-round oppression, hypocrisy. A man cannot die by inches without such knowledge and tremendous sensitivity. And so this condition becomes impossible.

"In Ireland some people went on a fast to get release from the prison. About thirty to forty people died along with MacSwini. Some became insane. And some died due to forced

feeding. Once you had strongly criticised MacSwini. Today you say that that criticism was not right. For twenty years, till today, people understood that he was wrong. Should people change their opinion suddenly because you have changed yours ?

"In Ireland, where flames of hatred and disdain were rising to the skies, only twenty people volunteered to die — how many would volunteer here? In Ireland the weapon of fast lost its edge because they adopted a cat and mouse policy. A man would be released when he was almost dying, the moment he improved after release, he would be arrested, again would be released when he would be dying . . . How many people can face this kind of torture ?

"Now I shall come to the subject of your fast.

"I want to clarify a couple of things. You are mistaken in your belief that the Working Committee approves of this step. Its silence was not consent but sullenness. The Working Committee members found your attitude irksome when you said, 'I do not yet know what step to take, but I will come to know.' To wait till you discover a way does not appeal to them.

"I would like to present my meaning about 'death is a necessary facet of non-violence'. A chaste woman may die by poison or commit suicide if her purity is threatened and there is no other way out for her; — if there are riots, a brave man may plunge into the fray and die, people like Socrates may die courageously by drinking poison; people like Telmacus may jump in the midst of a fighting crowd and die; prince of *Muktadhara* may release the water-fall by jumping into it, but everyone had a specific aim, or else the world does not understand the sacrifice.

"In the years 1924 and 1932 you heard your inner voice, against which you did not listen to anyone, before commencing your fast you had not even discussed the question with anyone. I was not present during the Rajkot episode, but that also must have been a sudden inspiration. I gave a fitting answer to Linlithgow at that time when he sarcastically asked me whether Gandhiji had decided to fast before he left Wardha.

"The fast opposing Macdonald was of a different kind to the previous one. You had undertaken it after a lot of thought, and you had discussed about it in detail with Vallabhbhai and self. This time you have been discussing the possibility of a fast so the fast becomes open to discussion as it should. During the last three years you have discussed twice about a declared fast and have been kind enough to desist from it on account of

overwhelming arguments against it. This time the arguments if not stronger are as powerful as they were before.

1. This withdrawal has been wrongly interpreted, some may honestly not have understood it; but there is bound to be a very big class of people who honestly do not understand about a fast; and we would lose the sympathy of those few in England who understand you.

2. I would say that this time the Government has taken into confidence people like Ambedkar, simply in order that you may undertake a fast and die. To play into their hands is not a clever strategy.

3. Members of the Working Committee do not understand anything about this, they cannot join in.

4. People would become totally confused and would become incapable of doing anything.

5. In the Macdonald episode we had a specific intention. This time the specific intention may be said to be of withdrawal of the British from India, but if to stop the war a fast against Japan, Germany, Britain and America is useless, this fast also can be as useless.

6. God forbid, if something happens to you, you would be leaving a legacy of hatred for the English for ever till the existence of sun and moon.

7. During the last Satyagraha when you talked of a fast, one argument of mine appealed to you, — Thoreau's words, which made it a duty for millions to be in prison, and the opportunity you ought to give to the people and to us. You are not giving us this opportunity.

8. The war should end within about a year. — They are losing and will still lose. Till then we should struggle, not by plunging the country into a hysteria, but in a composed manner and there is nothing wrong if a hundred thousand of us go to prison. That would be a good moral protest and you would be playing a bigger role when peace is achieved.

9. I would have chosen the issue of pacifism for our struggle. In days gone by signatures of millions of workers and others in Europe had been taken to avoid war, but nothing materialised. We could have taken that opportunity — we lost it even during Satyagraha for the policy of non-embarrassment. We should revive it, if it could somehow be revived.

10. Earlier you had told Miraben that you would not fast if you are permitted to publish *Harijan* from the prison. I do not know whether she has told Laithweight or not. How would

it appear if you start a fast, without taking even water, in case she has told him ?

"Please excuse me but I feel that the entire idea is delusory. Please remove from your mind the idea of short and swift. Just as mango-trees do not grow in a hurry, sacrifices also cannot be offered in a hurry. You please draft a manifesto, as you had indicated in the first draft of the resolution, and ask for voluntary non-participation in the war effort and for non-co-operation from government servants, labourers, pleaders, students, soldiers and others. Hundreds of thousands of copies of this manifesto should be distributed in villages and cities of every province and those who can abide by it happily should do so, and as a result they may go to prison, get beaten, may get shot, may take out processions and invite beating and being shot at, rather than disperse. All the people should begin this programme with a prayer and a three days' fast, followed by a general strike of one or three days in which railway workers and other workers should also be invited. If this much could be done and thousands go to prison, I believe that it would not be a bad show, and would be a good moral protest. Whatever we want to do, we must have consent and co-operation of many people whom we consider as ours.

"Gulzarilal has been talking about the conditions of the labourers. He envisages a lot of impediments in a programme among multitudes. Three articles have come from *Pratap* today. In the article written by Balkrishna Sharma, there is an appeal to you, 'Any movement among the labour will, without doubt, result in Hindu Muslim riots, please keep everything in abeyance for the present because there is going to be nothing else but failure in any programme' — This is just for your information.

Your servant

Mahadev's *Pranams*.¹²

When all the four letters were sent to Vinoba, he clarified through a letter to Kishorelal, that if through his talk with Bapu two days ago an impression has been created that he supported the idea of starting the struggle with a fast unto death, he confesses that he had not been able to convey his thoughts properly. His consent was for the principle that one could go on a fast with faith, and that when violence is at its worst, that time could be considered as proper for such a complete experiment of non-violence. He explained that he could not understand the sentence 'short and swift' in Mahadev's letter and said, "A fast cannot at all be undertaken to bring about a swift result. Bapu should not take such a step in haste, but I do not

like to write this sentence about Bapu . I believe that Bapu is not going to be hasty. But as Mahadevbhai's quoted sentence suggests, if some idea of speed, which sometimes assails great leaders, has entered Bapu's mind, I would request Bapu to wait patiently. My personal tendency and thought is towards 'beginning' with a fast unto death. Such a fast should come on its own.³

On the 29th July 1942, Gandhiji made the following note after reading all the five letters :

" 'Short and Swift' does not mean at all what Mahadev contends. The issue was, to start with, a fast. Even today it is there But that can be only if a fast is inevitable, inspired through Divine intervention where intellect has no place. But today the idea is totally irrelevant. I can ward off other doubts. I am not going into them now All the doubts would be warded off by themselves in due course."³

The August session of the All India Congress Committee was approaching. Three weeks before the above letter was written to Bapu, Mahadev informed Jivanji Desai, the Managing Trustee of Navajivan that he had got himself examined by an expert diagnostician in Bombay. "Nothing worth mentioning had been found !!!" He said that "I felt giddy because of the heat and could not see momentarily because of the same thing. I have left worrying as everything is all right" In this test stool, urine and blood were examined, not the heart! He wrote to Jivanjibhai after two or three days after Bapu's letter (30th July 1942). "I get tired after all the writing I have to do. And so can't even glance at the Gujarati or the Hindi edition of *Harijan* But there were several complaints about the translation !"⁴

He made Babla take down the notes of Bapu's lecture delivered before the Tahmi Sangh prior to the departure to Bombay He scrutinised the notes, gave 75% marks and asked him to compare them with his own notes, but praised Babla's notes to Pyarelal and Sushilaben.

Mahadev went to many of the Ashramites and bade farewell at Sevagram. Normally Mahadev never did this before a journey. After reaching Bombay, in the letter, the last to Durga, he expressed anxiety for her health, but said that he was not worried about Babla anymore, because he did not at all waste his time and had become capable of studying on his own

On reaching Bombay, he became so busy that nobody could imagine that Mahadev had been unwell. He took down notes of the addresses of Bapu and Sardar at the Congress Session. He looked through Bapu's post during other speeches

The members of the Congress Working Committee also had opposed Bapu's intention of going on a fast unto death immediately on being sent to prison. Jawaharlal had insisted that Bapu should not tie himself down by such a decision. Maulana said that such a step should be the last step. Pant voiced his fear that there would be violence and chaos because of it. Satyamurti felt that free India would need Bapu more than slave India. Prafulla Ghosh believed that a fast would be a suicide. Narendra Dev said that he was totally against a fast. Shankarrao Dev had agreed to a point by saying, "If I do not get the opportunity to die by a bullet I shall die by a fast." Sardar had registered a strong protest.⁵

Gandhiji consoled the Working Committee by saying that he had not come to any decision.⁵

On the night of the 8th August, after the 'Quit India' Resolution was adopted, Mahadev and Gandhiji differed on the point as to the steps the Government was likely to take. Mahadev believed that the Government would immediately arrest Gandhiji. Gandhiji believed that he had said in his address that he would give 15 days period by writing a letter to the Viceroy. If he did not receive a suitable reply, he would start the struggle, and so at least for 15 days or for even about a month there were likely to be no arrests. After the evening prayer Gandhiji went to sleep and slept soundly. But Mahadev did not sleep the whole night. At four o'clock in the morning he felt that Gandhiji would prove right as usually he had been arrested at mid-night and that time had passed. He went to telephone to find out whether Sardar was arrested or not, but failed to get a connection. He wasn't sure whether the phone was out of order or whether it was deliberately disconnected. Swami Anand was going out to phone from Ruita's bungalow, next door, when half-way down he saw the police vans. He returned with the information. There was a warrant for Mahadev's arrest with Gandhiji, for which he was very happy. They were told that if Pyarelal and Kasturba wanted to accompany them they could do so. There were no warrants for their arrest. Kasturba made a great decision of her life in a moment. She was aware that this may be the last imprisonment. She would have liked to be with Gandhiji; but he would like her to be arrested after addressing a meeting that evening at Shivaji Park, and so Kasturba said, "I would like to be with you this time, but more than that I would like to fulfil your wish, and so I will stay back."

Narayan started packing for his father. He was on the point of packing the bundle of blank papers he had kept from the beginning of the year for his father to write something original, but Mahadev stopped him from doing so. "There is no need to give any luggage

with me. Bapu's fast is hanging over my head like a Damocles's Sword. If he undertakes a fast, the Government this time, might allow him to die. I am not going to live to see all this. I do not know whether I shall live even for a week in prison." He merely took a small Gita and Rabindranath's drama, *Muktadhara*.

Before leaving with the Police Inspector, Mohanlal Desai and others, all of them participated in prayers. Which step did Gandhiji take without prayers?

Gandhiji had announced in the meeting of the 8th that after his arrest every Indian was his own leader. One should work as he thought right keeping in view the condition of non-violence. Moreover, Gandhiji had also predicted that this movement was going to be swift and short. Thinking of that Narayan said at the time of bidding farewell, "Papa! Now we will meet in Free India!"

In reply to this Mahadev kissed Babla and then he went out and sat in the rear seat of the jeep. Years ago when a president of a meeting called him in the front and asked him to speak, he had said, "I am used to stay behind the Chair, not in the front." He had not given up that habit.

At V.T. station in Bombay they met the members of the Working Committee in a special train for prisoners. They met Jawahar who had bid farewell to Indira. Sardar separated from Maniben. Jawahar has written in his diary, "When would I be able to see Indu again?" In Mahadev's diary, the worry expressed is about Bapu — not about Babla.

* * *

Six months later Durga, Kanu Gandhi, and Narayan were allowed to enter the Agakhan Palace on 17th February 1943. During Gandhiji's twenty-one days fast they had got the permission to stay with him to nurse him as his dear ones for three weeks. The condition was that they had to stay as prisoners.

Durga's control of months was lost and tears flowed from her eyes when she bowed at Gandhiji's feet, where he was lying, fasting. Bapu could utter only one word — 'Mahadev' . . . and his eyes also shed tears. Durga slipped away from there so that Bapu may not suffer. Narayan saw Gandhiji in tears for the first time.

They stayed in the Agakhan Palace for three weeks. During the three weeks of closeness they dwelt upon many memories of Mahadev, when Sushilaben described that incident in detail. Narayan realised the truth that Mahadev's keen desire to draw his last breath in Bapu's lap had been fulfilled on the 15th August. Ba's eyes gave expression to Bapu's immense pain when she only said, "Bapu has suffered a big loss in Mahadev's demise!" And when Pyarelal said, "We kept on merely talking and Mahadevbhai put into practice 'Do

or Die',” they remembered Kishorelal’s words spoken in Sevagram six months earlier :

“Who can deny his right to be Gandhiji’s representative? When he was alive, he always represented him and genuinely earned the right to represent him in death.”

FOOTNOTES :

1. G. M. Nandurkar, *Sardarshruti-Patro* - 4, p.108
- 1a From the hand-written copies of the three letters from Author’s correspondence
2. It can be surmised from the three letters from the colleagues that this letter must have been written on 27-7-42 From the Author’s correspondence
3. From the Author’s hand-written correspondence
4. Zerox copy of a hand written letter from Manu Jivaji Desai’s correspondence
5. From M D ’s unpublished Diary

Whenever I think of Mahadevbhai
I am reminded of
the following verse:

“Who will not bow to him;
Who always has a smiling face;
Who has a speech full of sweetness
In a compassionate heart
And whose deeds help others?”

— *Vinoba*

A son does not become a son only by inheriting a part of the father's body. He becomes a son when he adopts completely the good thoughts of his father along with his body. He is fit to be a son even if he inherits only the good thoughts without the body. Mahadevbhai was Bapu's son in the latter sense.

* * *

Rama would not have been able to accomplish his task without Lakshmana. Knowing this fully Rama took Lakshmana with himself. Tulsidas has written : “Lakshmana became the pole for Rama's flag of fame.” It can be said that Mahadev had the same quality.

— *Vinoba*

APPENDIX I

MAHADEV'S JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE

- 1892 : Born on 1-1-1892, at Saras, Taluqa Olpad, Dist. Surat
Originally from Dihen, Taluqa Olpad, Surat
Father : Haribhai Surbhai Desai
Mother : Jamnaben Haribhai Desai
- 1899 : Invested with Sacred Thread. Mother died.
- 1901 : Attended Primary School in the villages where father was transferred.
- 1901 : Admitted to Manishankar Master's English School.
Completed three years' course in 18 months.
- 1902 : Admitted in English 4th Standard in Junagadh.
- 1903 : Father was transferred to Adajan. So arranged to attend Surat High School. Lived at Adajan.
- 1904 : Mahadev, a shy boy by nature, gave a lecture from behind the curtain (on prohibition) against alcohol at Damka village near Hajira, adjacent to Surat.
- 1905 : Married Durga Khandubhai Desai from Kaliawadi near Navsari
- 1906 : Stood first in the city of Surat in the Matriculation Examination at the age of 14
- 1907 : Admitted to Elphinstone College, Bombay. Arranged boarding and lodging in Gokuldas Tejpal Boarding
- 1908 : Perusal and study of books on literature and philosophy from the college library.
- 1909 : Began to write poems in English. But desisted doing so on the advice of a professor not to hasten in writing poetry. Commenced writing in *Elphinstonian*, the college magazine, under the nom-de-plume 'Bhola Shambhu'
- 1910 : Became a graduate. Got a job at Rs. 60/- per month in the Oriental Translators.
- 1911 : Passed First LL.B.

- 1913 : Passed Final LL B. Stood first in the University in the subject of 'Equity'.
- 1915 : Was selected to compete in the Prize Contest declared by The Gujarat Forbes Association, to translate Lord Morley's *On Compromise*, and won a prize of Rs. 1,000/-.
Registered as a lawyer in the District Court at Ahmedabad.
Studied the Bengali language, successfully translated Rabindranath Tagore's *Chitrangada* Saw Gandhiji for the first time on 4-7-1915 at Premabhai Hall at Ahmedabad
Felt like sitting at his feet at the first meeting.
- 1916 : Mahadev accepted a job as an Inspector in a Co-operative Bank as his father retired as a teacher.
- 1917 : Came with Durga to Gandhiji in the Political Conference at Godhra on 2-11-1917.
Went to Champaran with Gandhiji on 3-11-1917 after taking father's permission.
- 1918 : Participated in the Textile Workers' struggle at Ahmedabad, along with Gandhiji.
Joined Gandhiji in the Kheda Satyagraha and Recruitment
- 1919 : Gandhiji called Mahadev his 'heir' when he was arrested for the first time in India on his refusing to obey the order preventing him from entering Punjab. Mahadev decided to swim through a life of service like that of Hanuman and did not accept any right of being Gandhiji's 'heir'.
A rather long sickness - typhoid - when at Sabarmati Ashram.
- 1920 : Came into personal contact with many leaders such as Chittaranjan Das, Motilal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore. Attended meetings of Congress and Khilafat Committees. Toured the Punjab and South India with Gandhiji.
- 1921 : As the Editor of Motilal Nehru's *The Independent* at Allahabad, brought out a hand-written copy of that daily on the Press being sealed
First arrest and imprisonment — 24-12-1921.
- 1922 : Stay in Naini, Agra and Lucknow jails. Translated *Virajvahu and Three Stories* during imprisonment
Learnt Urdu language. Could not attend his sister Shanta's marriage.
- 1923 : Released from Lucknow Jail on 23rd January Started writing for *Navajivan* Became the Editor of *Navajivan* on Kakasaheb being arrested. Father died of heart-attack
- 1924 : Handed over the Editorship of *Navajivan* to Gandhiji on his being released from jail. Took it over once again

- during Gandhiji's 21 days' fast for communal harmony. Presented an exact picture of his functioning as the President of the Belgaum Congress. His son, Narayan, was born.
- 1925 : Publication of *Satyagrahani Maryada* and *Arjunvani*. The English translation of Gandhiji's *Autobiography* published serially. Toured the entire country with Gandhiji.
- 1926 : Took down notes with Shri Punjabhai, of Gandhiji's lectures on the Gita at Sabarmati Ashram, on the basis of which Gandhiji's book, *Gita Shikshan* was later on published. Was made the President of the Managing Committee of the Satyagraha Ashram.
- 1927 Received the Prize from the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (Gujarati Literary Conference) for his articles in the *Navajivan*. Toured Ceylon descriptions of which appeared later in his book, *With Gandhiji in Ceylon*.
- 1928 : Worked initially with Sardar and later on with the Inquiry Committee, during the Bardoli Satyagraha was laid down for quite some time having slipped near the well at Sabarmati Ashram.
- 1929 : Toured Burma with Gandhiji for two weeks. Published *Bardoli Satyagrahano Itihas*. Inquiry into the economic condition of Matar Taluqa with Kumarappa. Attended the Lahore Congress.
- 1930 : Writings for the preparations for the Salt Satyagraha. Leading role in that Satyagraha. Sentenced for six months on 26th April.
- 1931 : In England with Gandhiji for the Round Table Conference, after his own release from jail. Later on accompanied him in his Europe tour. Successful editing of *Young India* from England. Rajaji and Kumarappa published the articles written during the RTC in a book named *The Nation's Voice*.
- 1932 : In the Yeravda Jail with Gandhiji and Sardar.
- 1933 : Rearrested after release from jail. Wrote *Gita According to Gandhi* in the Belgaum jail which was published after his death.
- 1934-'35 . In Wardha and in tour with Gandhiji.
- 1936 : President of the Journalist Section of Gujarati Literary Conference. The Gujarati translation of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* published.
- 1937 : Welcomed the decision of his son not to attend a

- Government School and commenced training and educating him through his own work.
- 1938 : Gandhiji became upset at Kasturba, Durga and some others entering the temple at Jagannath Puri. On account of embarrassment Mahadev prepared and offered to leave Gandhiji. But Gandhiji refused point blank to let him go. Health suffered
- 1939 : Played an important part, under the guidance of Gandhiji in the peoples' movements in the States of Rajkot and Mysore.
- 1940 : Successful tour of Bengal and the Punjab to get revolutionary prisoners released. Mahadev was entrusted with the responsible task of selecting Individual Satyagrahis
- 1941 : Health worsened. Successful attempt to bring peace in Ahmedabad during communal riots.
- 1942 : Arrested at Bombay on 9th August during the 'Quit India' movement. Died on 15th August in the Agakhan Palace at Pune, in Gandhiji's presence. Cremated by Gandhiji.

APPENDIX II

MAHADEV'S WRITINGS

Edited and compiled : *Mudhpuda, Arjunvani, Gandhiji's Autobiography* (Abridged),

Journalistic : *Navajivan, Haryanbandhu, Harijan, Harijan-Sevak, Young India, The Independent.*

Translations : In Gujarati

Chitrangada, 1915

Report of the Inquiry Committee for the Punjab Riots appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the All India Congress Committee, 1921

Prachin Sahitya (with Narahari Parikh), 1922

Tran Vartao (Sharadbabu), 1923

Biraj Bahu (Sharadbabu), 1924

Chitrangada Ane Viday Abhishap (Rabindranath Tagore) (With Narahari Parikh), 1925

Satyagraha-ni-Maryada (John Morley), 1926

Mari Jeevankatha (Jawaharlal Nehru), 1936.

Biographies :

Antyaj Sadhu Nand, 1925

Veer Vallabhbhai, 1928

Sant Francis, 1934

Be Khudai Khidmatgar, 1936

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, 1941.

Diary :

Volume 1 (1948) Volume 8 (1965)

Volume 2 (1949) Volume 9 (1968)

Volume 3 (1949) Volume 10 (1968)

Volume 4 (1950) Volume 11 (1969)

Volume 5 (1951) Volume 12 (1972)

Volume 6 (1964) Volume 13 (1973)

Volume 7 (1965) Volume 14 (1974)

- Volume 15 (1976)
- Volume 16 (1979)
- Volume 17 (1980)
- Volume 18 (1981)
- Volume 19 (1988)
- Volume 20 (1991)

About Freedom Movement :

Ek Dharmayudha, 1923

(History of the Textile Workers' Struggle)

Bardoli Satyagrahano Itihas, 1929.

Lectures :

Biji Bharuch Jilla Parishadman, 1923

Vritta Vivechan Ane Vritta Vivechako : Address given as the President of the Journalist Section of 12th Literary Conference, 1936

Miscellaneous : *Tarunya-man-Praveshti Kanya ne-Patro*

(With Narahari Parikh), 1937

Kheti-ni-Jameen (with Martand Pandya), 1942.

English :

The Epic of Travancore, 1925-'36

Gandhiji in Indian Villages, 1927

With Gandhi in Ceylon, 1928

The Story of Bardoli, 1929

A Nation's Voice, 1931

Unworthy of Wardha, 1943

The Eclipse of Faith, 1943

A Righteous Struggle, 1951

Gospel of Selfless Action

OR

The Gita According to Gandhi, 1946

Translation : In English

The Story of My Experiments with Truth, (M. K. Gandhi) 1927.

GLOSSARY

- Abhimanyu : Young Warrior in *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna's sister's and Arjuna's son. He was trapped by the Kauravas. He fought against six warriors single handed and was killed.
- Adiparva : The first chapter of the *Mahabharata*.
- Agnyadheya : A chapter of *Shatapatha Brahmana*.
- Ahimsa : Non-violence.
- Ahimsaist : One who believes in non-violence.
- Alekaum Salam : Part of the greeting used by Muslims when meeting each other.
- Anand Bhavan : The palatial residence of Pandit Motilal Nehru in Allahabad, which he donated to the nation.
- Anasaktiyoga : The name Gandhiji gave to the Gita because he emphasised the Philosophy of Detachment, or Anasakti found in the *Gita*.
- Anathashram : A home for the destitute.
- Anavils : High-Caste Brahmins from South Gujarat, known for the spread of education.
- Angad : One of the leaders of Rama's monkey-army. He was sent as an emissary by Rama to the Court of Ravana.
- Angad-Vishti : Before the war between Rama and Ravana started, Rama asked one of the monkey-princes, Angada, to discuss the terms of negotiation with Ravana. A treaty is called *Vishti*. In this case the leader of the Group, Angada, the son of Sugriv's brother Vali assumed responsibility of going to discuss the peace-terms.
- Arjuna : One of the five Pandavas. Lord Krishna's disciple.
- Ashawad : Optimism.
- Ashram : One of the four stages of life according to Hinduism : student, house-holder, hermit and ascetic, a hermitage.
- Ashram Bhajanawali* : An anthology of devotional songs.
- Ashramites : Inmates of an Ashram.
- Ashru-bhakti : Devotion shown through tears.
- Asopalav : A sacred tree, its leaves are used on auspicious or festive occasions.

Atman : The soul or the self.

Avatar : Incarnation.

Azad Hind Fauj : Indian National Army, formed by Subhash Chandra Bose in Japan during World War II to fight for India's freedom.

Baghabhai : A simpleton, somewhat flustered as a rule on every point.

Balakanda . Ayodhyakand And Sunderkand . These are the chapters of the *Ramayana*.

Bandh : To keep all activities closed as a mark of resentment.

Bania : Man of a traders' class Businessmen. Supposed to be clever

Bapji : A word used for addressing devotees or/and *sadhus*.

Baro-dada : Elder brother.

Bhagatji : A saintly devotee.

Bhagvad Gita : 'Song Celestial', Lord Krishna's teaching to Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*.

Bhagwata : The story of childhood of Krishna

Bhajans : Devotional songs

Bhakta : Devotee.

Bhakti-Yoga : The philosophy of devotion.

Bhangi : One of the lowest castes among the untouchables. Scavenger.

Bharata Shatrughna : Brothers of Rama who waited for him at Ayodhya while Rama was in exile

Bharatvarsha : India

Bhartrihari : A king who became an ascetic on knowing about his queen's infidelity.

Bilva Leaves . Lord Shiva is specially worshipped with leaves of the Bilva tree.

Biraj Bahu : The name of the heroine of a Bengali novel of the same name, by Sharatchandra Chatterjee.

Bismillah-i-rahmane-rahim : The first verse of the Quran starts with these words. They mean . Glory be to the All Merciful God.

Brahmacharya : Celibacy undertaken to attain spiritual elevation.

Brahmin : A member of the first or the highest of the four castes sanctioned by the Hindu religion (Literally one who knows Brahman, the Supreme Being.)

Buddha . Ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. A propounder of the philosophy of non-violence.

Central Provinces & Berar . The first name has been changed after independence to Madhya Pradesh, meaning the same thing. Berar was the anglicised pronunciation of 'Varad', now

known by its older name 'Vidarbha'. At present Vidarbha is a part of Maharashtra, not Madhya Pradesh.

Chakwa Chakwi : Legendary birds who have a curse upon them that separates them each night.

Champaran : A district in Bihar A province in Eastern India — where farmers were compelled by British businessmen to plant indigo in their fields.

Chanakya : The preceptor of Chandragupta, the first king of the Maurya dynasty in the era before Christ. He was instrumental in keeping back Alexander from invading India and in bringing a large area of the country under one domain. His book on political science known as *Chanakya Niti* is well known.

Charkha : The spinning wheel.

Charwak . An ancient exponent of the Atheistic theory 'eat, drink and be merry' — even at the cost of committing debts — for there is no rebirth

Chitrangada & Bidai Abhishap : Two dance-music dramas written by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali verse based on the Assamese princess Chitrangada in the Mahabharata.

Coliseum (also Colosseum) : A large stadium in ancient Rome

Dadhichi . A sage who sacrificed himself so that his bones could be used to make a weapon which could kill a dangerous demon.

Dakshinamurti : A leading educational centre founded by Shri Nanabhai Bhatt — a close colleague of Mahatma Gandhi.

Dal : Lentil soup.

Dandi March : The march that Gandhiji started on 12th March 1930 for breaking the Salt Law.

Darshan . Viewing Glimpse; generally connected with a spiritual attitude.

Dasharatha : Father of Rama. He allowed Rama to go to the forest in order to keep his word, and as a result died, heart-broken.

Deenabandhu : A brother of the poor. An epithet coined for Rev. C F. Andrews by Gandhiji.

Deen-Deen : War cry of the Muslims (Literally means Religion-Religion.)

Deshabandhu : A friend of the country; an epithet given to C R. Das by Gandhiji.

Dharma : Duty, function

Dhed : A caste among untouchables.

Dhritarashtra : Father of the Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. He did not stop his sons perpetrating continuous injustice to their cousins, the Pandavas

Dhriti : Steadiness, patience.

Dihen : Village in Surat District where Mahadev's ancestors lived

Diwali : The festival of lights.

Dnyanayoga & Karmayoga : The two philosophies which form the basis of the *Bhagwad Gita*, meaning the philosophies of meditation and action respectively.

Ekadashi : Eleventh day of moon-calendar.

Ekata-Yajna : The sacrifice for unity.

External Flame : The Lord's luminosity.

Fakirs : Muslims mendicants.

Fogat Falia : A small locality in Mahadev's maternal-parental home

Forbes Gujarati Sabha : A literary organisation in Gujarati named after Forbes who was a lover of Gujarati.

Ganpati : A Hindu Deity with an elephant's head.

Gandhi-cap : A small cap made of white Khadi which Gandhiji used to wear after coming from South Africa and before he took to the loin cloth.

Gandhi Jayanti : Gandhiji's birthday.

Gandhijiki-jai : May Gandhiji be victorious.

Gandhi Seva Sangh : An organisation of Gandhian workers

Ganga-Sagar : The place where the river Ganges meets the Bay of Bengal.

Ganges : A river of India, considered holy.

Gayatri Mantra : An incantation in praise of Brahma, which occurs in all the four Vedas

Geetanjali : An anthology of poems written by Rabindranath Tagore, which received the Nobel Prize.

Ghee : Purified butter.

Ginni : Bengali form of the Sanskrit word *Grithini*, which means housewife.

Gita Rahasya : The famous treatise on the *Bhagvad-Gita* by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Gokuldas Tejpal Boarding : A free hostel in Bombay started by the philanthropist, Gokuldas Tejpal.

Goondas : Ruffians who can go to any length of violence.

Gopies of Vrindavan : The milkmaids of the place where Krishna lived during his childhood. These milkmaids were completely in tune with Krishna

Gowalia Tank : A ground in South Bombay where the 'Quit India' resolution was passed by the Congress on the 8th August 1942, and 'Do or Die' slogan was given by Gandhiji.

Gujarati Sahitya Parishad : Gujarati Literary Society.

Gule-Gujarat . A poetic epithet — flower of Gujarat — given to Mahadev by Sarojini Naidu

Guru : Teacher, preceptor.

Hanuman : The monkey-devotee of Rama who loyally followed him. He was a life-long celibate

Harakiri : Japanese ritual of suicide.

Har Har Mahadev . War cry of the Hindus, meaning 'Hail Mahadev'.

Harijan Literally God's people. The word coined by Gandhiji for the untouchables. Also a weekly started by him in English after *Navajivan* and *Young India* were discontinued.

Harijanbandhu : The Gujarati version of *Harijan* — a periodical

Harijan Sevak Hindi edition of the three *Harijan* weeklies.

Harijan Sevak Sangh : The organisation that actively worked for the removal of untouchability.

Hari-om-Sadgurave Namaha Obeisance to God and Salutations to the worthy teachers.

Harishchandra . A king in Indian mythology who never uttered a falsehood and gave up his all for keeping his word.

Hindi Sahitya Sammelan : Hindi Literary Conference

Hind Swaraj : A booklet written by Gandhiji in 1909 when he drew a picture of his dream about India after independence.

Himsa : Violence

Himsak : Violent.

Home Rule League : An organisation started by Dr. Annie Besant which demanded Dominion Status from the British Rulers

Ibadat : Prayer.

Indian Opinion : The first periodical started by Gandhiji in South Africa

Japa : Repetition of God's name for concentration.

Jathas : Group formed for a religious purpose.

Jehad : Religious war.

Kabir : A Muslim Craftsman-saint-poet of medieval India.

Kaliyuga : The age of the prevalence of evil.

Kanarese : The language of Karnataka, a state in India.

Kathopanishad : One of the ten important Upanishads (the final portion of the Vedas). This Upanishad deals with the philosophy of life and death.

Kaumudi : Moon-light.

Kesan & Maratha : Newspapers started by Lokmanya Tilak in Marathi.

Khaddar or Khadi . The coarse cloth woven by hand from hand-spun yarn.

Khadi Kelan : Title of a story by Mahadev Desai

Khichadi . Mixed rice and dal boiled together This is supposed to be a good dish for the sick.

Khilafat . The territory under a Khalifa. . . . When the king of Turkey was dethroned, Muslims in many countries felt that the British had deprived the descendent of a Khalifa of his Khilafat . A movement to reinstate the Turkish King took shape among Muslims of many countries including India. Gandhiji backed the Khilafat movement in India, hoping to form thereby a brotherly bond with the Muslims.

Klesha and Fala . These words are used in an epic by Kalidasa, called *Kumar Sambhava*. They mean anguish and good result respectively

Kolis : People of a low caste.

Krishna . One of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The Preserver. One who gave the *Gita's* teachings

Kshatriyas : Warrior caste in India.

Kshipram : Quickly.

Kumbha Mela . A huge gathering of devotees that takes place in Prayag every 12 years

Kumkum . The red powder which Hindu women always wear on their foreheads unless they are widows. It is used by men also for auspicious rites.

La-ilah Illillah : God is one.

Lalaji : The name by which Lala Lajpatrai was generally known.

Lallukaka : The suffix *kaka* (uncle) is used as an indication of respect and familiarity.

Leader : An English daily published from Allahabad.

Lit the Pyre . According to Hindu custom the son lights the funeral pyre.

Lord Jagannatha : One form of Lord Krishna — The idol in the temple at Puri in Orissa.

Ma Anandmayee : A female ascetic of repute.

Madhpudo : Bee-hive.

Magan-Rentia . One type of spinning wheel, with two spindles

Maganwadi . An orchard of oranges near Wardha named in memory of Maganlal Gandhi — Gandhiji's nephew and his right-hand help.

Mahabharata (The) · The epic poem, depicting the story of the Kauravas and Pandavas. The *Gita* forms a part of this epic.

Maharashtra Dharma · The name of a periodical, meaning 'The Duty of Maharashtra'.

Mahatma : A great soul. An epithet used for Gandhiji, and has been used for many other persons.

Majoor Mahajan : Labourer's Union. *Mahajan* is the word used in pre-British India for organisations of different business communities.

Malkana Rajputs . Rajputs who had embraced Islam.

Mantra : A verse, usually in Sanskrit.

Moha : Infatuation.

Moksha : Salvation. The final condition of the soul.

Mopala Story : A group of Mopala prisoners from the State of Travancore (now part of Kerala) had died some time ago of suffocation in a police-van.

Mukti : Emancipation. The final condition of soul.

Nachiketa · The hero of Kathopanishad. He approached Yama, the God of Death and obtained Real knowledge from him.

Nauka Dubi · Tagore's novel in Bengali; translated into English under the title "The Wreck".

"*Neti Neti*" · . . . "Not this, Not this" A negative method of describing the greatness of the Ultimate Being (Brahma).

Pakistan : A separate Muslim State.

Pan-dan · A dish in which 'paan' (i.e. beetle leaves) are kept.

Pandas : Brahmin priests.

Pandit & Panditani : Learned man and learned woman — words often used for teachers.

Paramartha : The ultimate goal.

Paramhansa : A highly developed spiritual person.

Parashurama · Sixth incarnation of Vishnu, a Brahmin warrior.

Parnakuti : A thatched hut. (Here, Lady Thackerseys' Bungalow).

Patanjali : A noted Sanskrit philosopher, who wrote Science of Yoga.

Patel Falia : A village section of high-caste peasants.

Patels : People belonging to a high peasant caste.

Patels & Talats : Two officers of village.

Paurusha : Manhood, manliness.

Pausha · The name of a month in the Hindu Lunar calendar.

Peshwas : A dynasty of Marathi rulers.

Police-chowkies : Police-posts.

Prachin Sahitya · Ancient Literature. A collection of Tagore's

essays appreciating Classical / Sanskrit Literary works.

Prahlada : A child devotee of Lord Vishnu; son of the demon-king, Hiranyakashipu.

Prasad : Eatables which have been offered to God.

Puranas : Some of the Hindu scriptures.

Purushartha : Human effort, spiritual endeavour.

'Quit India' : Congress call to the British Government on 8th August 1942.

Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram : A repetitive chant; a great favourite of most Hindus — given special importance by Gandhiji. All the words are synonyms of Rama.

Raghuvansha : An epic poem by Kalidasa about the ancestors of Rama.

Rama : The seventh incarnation of Vishnu, King of Ayodhya.

Ramacharitamansa : The famous book written by Tulsidas, viz. the Hindi version of the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*.

Ramadhun : Repeated musical chanting of Ramanama.

Ramkrishna Kathamrita : Anecdotes and message from Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa : Vivekananda's Spiritual master, a spiritual mystic.

Ramanam : The name of Rama.

Ramanuja Bhashya : Learned commentary on the Bhagvad Gita by Ramanujacharya based on a different philosophy.

Ramayana : The epic poem depicting the life of Rama

Rangoon : Capital of Burma.

Rashtriya Shala : National School — Schools were started by Gandhiji to enable the students who gave up the Government schools to continue their studies.

Rashtriya Vidyapith : National University.

Rashtriya Vidya Mandir : The National Temple of learning.

Ravana : The demon-king of Lanka who opposed Rama.

Rishis : Sages, wise men.

Rotlas : Thick chapaties (unleavened bread).

Sabras : A Gujarati word for salt. Literally : "All tastes"

Sachha Baba : A holy ascetic.

Sacred Thread : A ceremony by which a boy is invested with a sacred thread which indicated his entry into the field of learning; meant only for some of the upper castes.

Sadhaka : One who goes through self-discipline in order to achieve some higher goal.

Sage : An ascetic.

Saket : A poem on the plight of Urmila, Lakshmana's wife in the epic *Ramayana*. The author of the poem was Maithilisharan Gupta.

Samata : Equanimity

Sannyas : The fourth stage in life according to ancient Hindu system — renunciation of earthly pleasures.

Sannyasins : People who have given up the world and live as mendicants, away from wordly relationships

Saraswati : A river of ancient India which is supposed to flow underground and join the Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad.

Sarbhan Ashram : An Ashram started at village Sarbhan on Gandhian lines.

Sarvodaya : Development of all the aims of most of Gandhiji's activities.

Sati : A woman devoted to and all wrapped up in her husband

Satva, Rajas, Tamas : The three modifications being on mind, according to Hindu Philosophy, which create different attitudes

Satyagraha Ashram : Literally the hermitage of adherence to Truth. The name given to the place of the community living with the purpose of social and political norms. Gandhiji lived here from 1916 to 1930.

Satyagraha Sabha : A meeting for explaining the idea of Satyagraha OR A Committee formed for offering Satyagraha

Satyagrahi : One who accepts the idea of Satyagraha and practises it.

Sevagram Ashram : Hermitage in a village of service in Central India. Gandhiji lived here after 1930

Shankar Bhashya : The learned commentary on the *Bhagvad Gita* by Shankaracharya.

Shantiniketan : Ancient type of educational institution started by Rabindranath Tagore.

Shastras : Religious scriptures.

Shatapatha Brahmana : One of the books of religious rites, following the Vedas, this type was known as Brahmanas. Shatapatha is the name of one of those Brahmanas.

Shloka : A Sanskrit stanza — verse.

Shraddha : Faith

Shuddhi : Literally the act of purification. Reconversion from Islam to Hinduism

Shukra Tarak Sama : As bright and shining as the evening star (Venus)

Sthita Pragna : A person whose "Pragna" (i.e. the higher intellect) is

steady in God

Stormy Congress Session : In 1907 which brought about a split between the extremists and the moderates during the early phase of India's struggle for freedom.

Sudarshan Chakra : The disc with which Krishna usually killed sinners.

Sudhanva : A devotee of Krishna who was ordered by the king to be thrown into a bubbling cauldron of oil, continued to sing the praises of the Lord even in the boiling oil.

Sujna Bhaishri : Respected and understanding brother

Surajya : Good Government.

Sutra Yagna . Sacrificial spinning — sacrifice in the form of producing the cotton thread.

Swadeshi : Of one's own country.

Swadeshi Movement : In 1905, a mass movement against foreign — especially British — goods.

Swarajya : Self-government

Tablig : The conversion from Hinduism to Islam (Propaganda).

Takli Spinning spindle used with a circular base without the Charkha.

Talati : A Government Officer in a village.

Tapas : Penance.

Tapascharya : Penance and self-discipline.

Tapasya : Penance

Tapibai : A nickname for fever based on the Gujarati word for fever, viz "Tav" Tapi is the name of a river near Surat — a word also used as a woman's name Bai = Lady.

Thakore Saheb : The ruler of a small kingdom in India 'Saheb' is a word of respect added in Gujarati to any name.

Than : Name of a place.

The Bombay Chronicle : An English daily which supported Gandhiji's movement.

The Independent : A weekly started by Pandit Motilal Nehru, in English.

Telemachus : An old Greek who died whilst stopping the barbaric sport of duels between unarmed men and lions and tigers.

Tilan-Tapkan : Signs made by red-powder (kumkum) and ashes on the forehead, denoting high caste

Tilwa Street : A village section of high-class Brahmins.

Tirtharaj Prayag : An old name of Allahabad, where the confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Jamuna and hidden Saraswati turn the place into a place of pilgrimage.

Tithal : A sea-side resort in South Gujarat.

Trishanku : A person who is neither here nor there. According to a Hindu legend, a sage called Vishwamitra promised heaven in the mortal body to a king, but when the king started ascending into heaven, he was pushed back to the earth. Vishwamitra, however, commanded him to stay where he was. So he was suspended between heaven and earth.

Tu Dayalu Dina Hum : A poem of humility describing God's compassion for the ordinary man.

Tulsi Plant : A plant considered to be sacred.

Twice-born : The boys invested with sacred thread are supposed to have taken re-birth for entering the field of education.

Udyogaparva : That portion of the *Mahabharata* where preparations for the great war start.

Upanishads : The Sanskrit treatise on the Vedas by various sages.

Urmila : Lakshman's wife.

Vairagya-Shataka : 100 verses on renunciation by King Bhartrihari.

Vaishnava Jana : A hymn in Gujarati by Narasinh Mehta describing the virtues of a God's man. This hymn was popularised by Gandhiji and at one time even many non-Gujarati speaking persons knew it by heart.

Vali : A man of God.

Valmiki : The writer of the *Ramayana* in Sanskrit. It is said that he was a robber converted into a saint.

Varnashrama : The system of the four castes (Varnas) and the four stages of life (Ashram).

Varna Vyavastha : Arrangement according to caste.

Vatican : The seat of Roman Catholicism.

Vedas : The most ancient religious texts of the Hindus.

Village Industries : An organisation for developing the village crafts.

Vishvabharati : The University of Shantiniketan.

Vivekananda : A leading spiritual figure of India, who stormed the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893 with an unforgettable address.

Vraja : The area near Mathura across the Jamuna which is supposed to be the place where Krishna lived in his childhood.

Vrijinam : (Original word Vrijin) Ocean (of sin).

Wardha Mahilashram : Women's residential institution in Wardha.

Yajna : Sacrifice, any activity for a purpose.

Yeravda : The prison situated in a village of that name near Poona.

Yoga-Vasishtha : A treatise on Yoga as propounded by sage
Vasishtha.

Yuga : An era.



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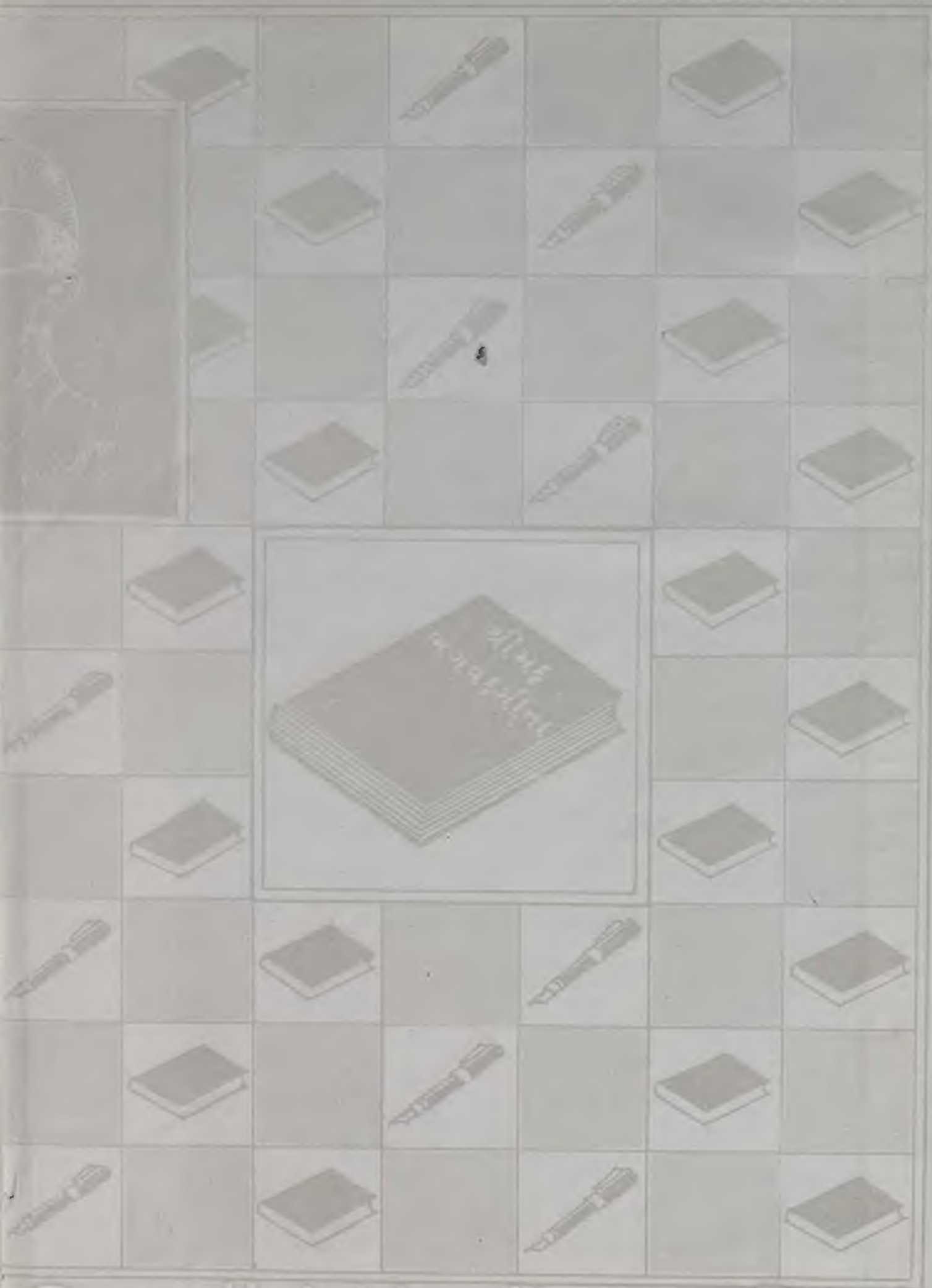


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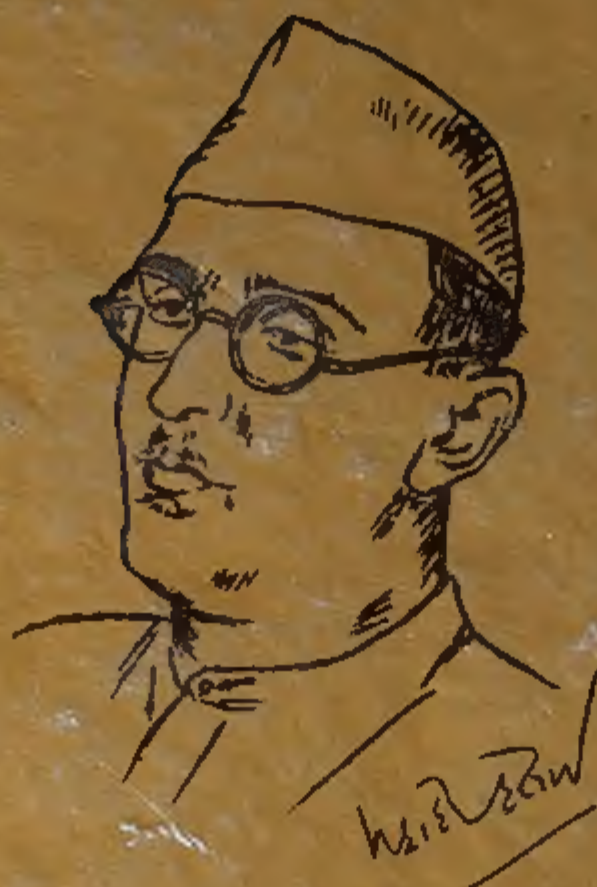
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